ELFRICA.

Joseph Hill
March 23rd
1888

ELFRICA.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'SOUTHWARK AND ITS STORY.'

'A mighty strong champion of Somerset.'
FULLER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
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'The time is short, and the work is great. The reward, also, is great, and the Master presses. It is not incumbent upon thee to finish thy work, but thou must not, therefore, cease from it.'—*The Talmud.*

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PREFACE.

Whilst collecting myths, legends, and lives of 'the men of old' connected with my native county of Somerset, I lighted upon the story of Sir John de Courcy, of which the tale of the championship only was familiar to me. As I dwelt upon it and sketched in the historical background, figures grouped themselves around my hero; and starting almost from his cradle, I continued with him till his death. Interwoven with his history is the exquisite episode of his friend Sir Almeric de Tristram's career. So pathetic are the legends attached to his name that I have scarcely dared to touch them for fear of

marring their beauty, and have transferred them with little or no alteration from the pages of Camden and Burke. Sir Almeric married his friend's sister, and his wooing and return to Ireland after his wife's death are nearly all that I have ventured to originate. On the other hand, Sir William de Briwere's story is almost purely historical, even to his being found when a babe on the heather in the New Forest by Henry II.* In spite of this sufficiently romantic commencement, De Briwere's life is essentially that of a courtier and politician; but he has the rare merit of wearing 'the white flower of a blameless life' through all the mazes of Court intrigue. Dr. Stubbs' 'Constitutional History' furnished me with the main points in his career, but it is Camden who says that 'though the minion of three kings, he was loved and embraced by all.' His friendship with De

* Some authorities substitute Henry I. for Henry II.; but this would necessitate a third Sir William de Briwere, and no accounts make mention of more than two.

Courcy and their education at Glastonbury are purely imaginary, though they may well have been as they are drawn. The idea furnished me with an excuse for exhibiting Glastonbury in its palmiest days, under the able and wise government of the great Abbot-Bishop, Henry of Blois. The contrast of two such differing types of mediæval character as the Knight of Chivalry and the wily Politician appeared to me likely to be productive of great interest.

My heroine's name, Elfrica, is a slight modification of her proper appellation Affrica, since it was represented to me that my book would probably be supposed to have some relation to the 'Dark Continent' rather than to be the story of a fair Scandinavian. She was the daughter of Godred, King of Man, but her mother was a Norwegian. The account of the family is to be found in Camden, but of her character I had but these hints: First, she was foundress of St. Mary's Abbey de

Jugo Dei, at Ardres, called the 'Grey Abbey,' where, it is said, among the exquisite ruins her effigy is still to be seen; and secondly, when Sir Almeric de Tristram bequeathed his heart to his friend, he added these three words, '*and his wife.*' They appeared to me to furnish a key to her character, and to point her out as worthy to make a third in the union of those chivalrous souls. For her individuality, such as I have drawn it, I am entirely responsible, and she is dear to me as a child of my own creation.

The legends of the Isle of Man are taken from Walrond's description of that island, and are only slightly embellished. Those of Somerset have been familiar to me from childhood, save only my discovery with a glad surprise, not long ago, of the identity of Cadbury Fort with King Arthur's Camelot.

The 'villains' of the piece are Prince, afterwards King, John, De Breauté, and the younger De Lacies. *Their* treachery,

and the forcible marriage by De Breauté of De Courcy's sister, the Countess of Devon and Wight, and the seizure of the Castle at Stoke Courcy, are matters of legendary story, but are, I believe, substantially correct. De Breauté's career may be traced in the 'Constitutional History.' On one point I have had to differ from Camden. He represents Prince John as only twelve years old when he visited Ireland with such disastrous results; but a comparison of dates shows that though he was that age when appointed Lord of Ireland, he did not proceed there till he was eighteen or nineteen.

The death of Sir William de Courcy at Rhuddlan in North Wales is historical, but whether he was the father of Sir John de Courcy I do not know.

The only purely original characters of any importance are Maude Heatherington, Sir Bertram of Exmoor and his daughter Edgitha, and Lucie Alice de Breauté. Sir Damian de Lacy, though as imaginary

as these, is not my own creation; I have transferred him from the pages of Sir Walter Scott's 'Betrothed.' Always a favourite hero of mine, I could not resist borrowing him when our tales touched at the same point. But should some exact critic endeavour to reconcile my chronology with that of Sir Walter Scott, he will signally fail. I only beg him to believe in the accuracy of mine.

It rests with the public to say how far I have contrived from these materials to make an interesting tale. I part with my *dramatis personæ* as friends with whom I have travelled far; and as they proceed on their hazardous voyage alone, I push off my vessel from the shore, trusting that the oil of kindliness may allay the rough waves of criticism and grant 'Elfrica' a safe voyage.

THE AUTHOR.

ELFRICA.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHASE AND THE GAME.

It was the year 1155. The country, with a great sigh of relief, was enjoying a breathing-time after nearly twenty years of cruel and devastating warfare. The contest for the crown had ceased by the arrangement made before Stephen's death, and Henry of Anjou succeeded unopposed to the vacant throne. He had occupied it just a year, when in one of the short intervals of rest that he allowed himself from affairs of state a great hunt was held

in the glades of that forest whose name was not then as great an anomaly as it is now.

The trees in the New Forest stood in all their stately grandeur, and game of every kind was to be found within its limits. The horns of the hunters, the baying of the dogs, the crashing of the underwood, gave notice that there was a large assemblage, and a gay company came dashing through the bracken; but as the deer chose different tracts for safety, the hunters separated, and each selected and pursued his own particular quarry.

Foremost among the party rode the young King. Of firm build and well-knit frame, little recked he whether it were grave business and toilsome labour, the eager hunt, or the gay dance; into each he entered for the time with a vehemence which was part of his nature. He was distinguished only from the other hunters by the small gold circlet round his hunting-cap, save perhaps that his dress was less

costly, and more carelessly put on, than that of his attendant courtiers. As the hunters chose their various paths, Henry, noting a fine stag with branched antlers, followed it alone down a silent glade, into a secluded part of the forest. On flew the stag, pursued by the dogs; the King followed close. The sobbing breath of the animal marked that it was well-nigh spent, yet still it kept ahead of its pursuers; but, just as the King had drawn his bow and let fly an arrow, it made a sudden turn, and dashed off in another direction.

Silence reigned around, when the faint wail of a child was heard, and the unexpected sound absolutely startled the King. The arrow he had let fly, instead of laying low the deer, glanced against a tree, and turning aside, fixed itself in the ground by the side of a small moving bundle.

Again a wail, almost rising to a shriek. Henry dismounted. Had he unwittingly slain a child instead of a deer? Kneeling on one knee, the more easily to discover

who and what the little creature was from whom the mournful and passionate cries proceeded, the King turned back one corner of the deer-skin which enfolded the babe, and saw a small dark-eyed child of some ten months old. He tried to lift him from the heather on which he lay, and then discovered that one corner of the deer-skin was pinned to the earth by his arrow.

'Well that my shaft did not find its billet in your breast, my young master!' said he. 'How found you your way here? Truly this heather is a fitter couch for thy soft limbs than many a hard pallet!' A ranger came in sight. 'I have lost my quarry for the nonce, but, Ralph, follow the dogs, and see that it be marked as a hart royal—no meaner hand than my own shall lay it low!'

The ranger started off to endeavour to mark the animal sufficiently to prevent punishment for interfering with the King's game. The King, meanwhile, looked

around to see if anyone, dog, woman, or child, were in sight, to whom the babe could belong; but no one was to be seen.

'A fine appearance should I make, truly,' he said, 'with a babe in my arms; yet I am loath either to raise him from his heather couch or to leave him here.'

He wound his horn once, twice, and again; and at the well-known note came the galloping of horses, the baying of dogs, and the voices of men nearer and nearer.

'Here, De Courcy!' said he, as Sir William de Courcy, butler to the Empress Maude, and now holding the same office to her son, was seen foremost among the hunters; 'what think you of the spoils of my chase?'

'What has your Grace there?' said De Courcy, as he alighted and drew near.

'It is well that I did not make a short and sharp end to the child's life after the fashion in which my great-uncle, the Red King, met his death,' said Henry, as he pointed to the infant.

Just then the child, who had been silenced by astonishment at the sight of the strangers bending over him, shrieked out again louder than before.

'Not much need to ask what I have found; he tells us that himself; but how came he here?'

'That, I fear, he cannot tell us. But 'tis a likely child. He is nearly the age of my own little lad when I saw him last, though scarcely such limbs as his. Poor little fellow!' added the kindly Baron; 'what will your Grace do with him?'

'I know not; here, Giles, Perkins! know you aught of this child?' and the King addressed two of the prickers belonging to the forest.

'No, may it please your Grace.'

'At any rate, you know the neighbourhood; see, quick! if you can find a woman to take charge of the babe.'

In the meantime the child's cries had ceased; bewildered by all the noise and bustle, the bright colours, and the shifting

crowd, the little fellow opened his dark eyes and stared, without attempting to move.

'Well, my Lords, has your sport been more successful than mine?'

As if in answer to the King's question, on the moment came in sight three fine bucks, borne by attendants. It was proposed at once to broil some steaks and take their nooning there.

As a space was being cleared and the rough repast prepared, Giles and Perkins approached, bringing, or rather dragging, with them a woman, whose wild air, pale face, and hurried manner showed that she was in a greatly disturbed state of mind; but whether from grief, despair, or terror, it was hard to say.

Her appearance recalled the attention of the King and De Courcy to the babe. They turned and looked at him; he lay, with his little white shirt reaching to his dimpled knee, his face flushed with a bright colour, the teardrops still standing on his

face, his dark eyes closed, and their long fringes resting on his cheek, whilst his bright brown hair was lifted by the breeze; the deer-skin was round him to shield him from the cold, but he had fallen asleep.

It was an exquisite picture: the heather, glowing with a brilliant purple, formed a couch with whose richness no royal robe could compare; and above, a canopy of magnificent trees bent over the child as he lay sleeping below.

'May it please your Grace,' said Giles, 'we have found a woman.'

'It pleases me well,' said the King.

'Your Grace surely does not intend to leave him with the wretched peasants who alone inhabit this forest-land?' said De Courcy.

'No; those who have cast him out are scarce those to whom to entrust him. Whose estates border on this part of the forest?'

'The land adjoining belongs to the

Abbey of Glastonbury, may it please your Grace,' said Perkins.

'And,' added De Courcy, laughing, 'all waifs and strays belong of right to my Lord Abbot.'

'A good thought,' answered the King; 'to Glastonbury he shall go. What say you, my Lord? You spoke but yesterday of visiting your lady at Stoke; will you let the child travel in your train?'

The Baron de Courcy hesitated. His train, such as it was, consisted only of his Squire and some half-dozen followers; he having dismissed his troop to their homes immediately on his return from France, whilst he, in virtue of his office, had remained in attendance on the King. He felt the doubtful and somewhat ludicrous position he should be placed in, by appearing as protector to a fine infant. He did not care to apologize for or explain his actions, yet it would be necessary everywhere to tell the story of the finding of the child (which, after all, many might dis-

believe) in order to justify its appearance under his protection; and yet, as he looked again at the boy, he thought of his own infant heir, and wondered how he should feel at leaving him to strangers, cold and careless, if not actually unkind.

The King saw his hesitation; but the cause was not likely to strike a man of King Henry's personal character, and who, moreover, was utterly reckless as to appearances.

'I did not intend, De Courcy,' said he, 'to burden you with the child at Stoke, but only to ask your conduct as far as Glastonbury.'

The thought of his own child had won the day, and Sir William answered cheerfully:

'Nay, your Grace; for that matter he would be a fine playmate for my little Jack, though he is scarce as old as my little lad; and some day, when my boy goes to Glastonbury to be trained in godly learning, it may chance that they will be friends;

but what commands shall I bear to my Lord Abbot?'

'Commands!' said Henry, laughing; 'the Lord Abbot of Glastonbury and Bishop of Winchester is far more likely to lay his commands upon me—and get them obeyed, too!—than I upon him. Why, man! Henry of Blois in the late troubles played the part of a Kingmaker, and put down and set up whom he would. My mother and King Stephen prospered each in turn as they paid court to the Church in the person of Abbot Henry.'

The woman was now brought forward by the two foresters. She looked haggard and wild. The men said she was willing to take charge of the child; probably they would have compelled her to do so, whether she would or no.

The King asked her if she knew aught of the child.

'How should I?' said she. 'Many and many a child—and woman too—have

been left to perish when the husband was dragged to fight, first for one who claimed the crown, and then for another, and, whichever they fought for, if they fell into the hands of the other, they were put to death as traitors!'

'Hush, woman!' said De Courcy. 'Know you to whom you speak?'

'I know not,' said the woman, 'nor do I care; is it not enough to murder the father and bread-winner, but each in turn must needs lay waste more land—afforesting they call it; but what does it mean but starving men, women, and children, and bringing the curse of God down upon their own heads?'

She spoke with a savage bitterness that, at another time and in another mood, would have aroused all the wrath of the Plantagenet; but the beauty of the deserted child had softened Henry's heart, and he spoke soothingly:

'It is true, woman, that we are not altogether guiltless in this. We scarce knew

the rights of the matter when we desired more land to be afforested.'

'No, nor cared to know,' said she.

'Try not my patience too far. We *do* care to know; and we trust you shall, in time to come, know us as your good lord. Civil war and strife will cease now that all men allow me, Henry Plantagenet, to be rightful King; and we trust to keep good peace in the land, and that they that sow shall reap. But now tell me, have you husband or child?'

'None, none!' she said, and she wrung her hands; 'all, all are gone, and I am left alone, and there is none that careth for me.'

'Then wilt thou leave this place, which is so full of sadness to thee, to take charge of this child?'

'Yes, yes,' she answered; and as she spoke she moved nearer and nearer to the child, but averted her face, as if she dared not trust herself to look at him.

'Thy name?'

'Maude Heatherington.'

Then the King told her that he had arranged that the Lord de Courcy should take charge of her and the child on the way to Glastonbury, when they would be placed under the care of the Lord Abbot.

She heard as though she heeded not, and scarce even seemed to know what the King had said, but ever she crept nearer.

'And now, De Courcy,' said the King, 'as soon as thou hast shared our hunter's meal, and the woman and child have been satisfied, we will speed thee on thy way.'

'I shall be ready, my Lord, but must beg some more definite instructions.'

'Bear, then, my greetings to my Lord Abbot, and say to him that I took the child from the heather bed, and that, with his permission, I will that he be brought up in the monastery, but not professed. Time will show what he is fit for. Say also that I make myself answerable for the child's maintenance and future career; but let him be taught that his future depends

upon *my* will and his own deserts, and that he who makes can unmake; also that for the present, at least, I will that this woman shall have the charge of the babe. Let his name be De Bruyère; he was found on the heather; and if Plantagenet takes his name from the golden broom, a humble plant which is now flaunted high enough in the world, it shall depend upon himself how high he bears the purple heath.'

'Which now bears him,' said De Courcy.

The Baron turned aside to give orders to his own followers to detach themselves from the others. He deputed the charge of the woman and child to a sturdy old Somersetshire yeoman, who, though a grandfather, was hale and hearty. Old Humphry of Watchet was too old to care for the rough jokes of his companions, too blunt not to pay them back in their own coin, and withal too tender-hearted not to take kindly care of his strange charge. So the old fellow made his

arrangements. He had as soft a seat as he could contrive fastened on behind his saddle, and put a belt round his waist by which the woman could steady herself.

Meanwhile, Maude Heatherington stood near the child, still sleeping on its purple couch. She had edged nearer and nearer to the babe. The King moved and stood between them.

'Woman,' he said, 'I will deal with this child'—she looked up—'and you'—her eyes dropped wearily—'as you deal by me.'

'What is the child to me,' said the woman, 'save as the means of earning me bread to eat, for I am well-nigh starved?'

'I know not,' said Henry, 'whether the babe be aught to you or not; but if the child lives, I will not have instilled into its mind, like another Moses, hatred to me and to my race'—he looked fixedly at her—'hatred to him who has saved his life.'

'And how much shall I see of him?

He will be nurtured in the Abbey, and taught to despise his nurse as of a different race from a king's minion.'

'Woman,' said Henry, 'you would fain try my patience. It will depend upon yourself, I say, how much you see of the boy, and what he will be to you.'

The King moved from between her and the sleeping babe. For the first time she turned to look at the child, and oh! what a change came over her face! She bent down as if she could bear the struggle no longer. Again the King moved between them. He prevented her, and stooping down, himself lifted the child from the heather.

'Take this child,' he said, 'and nurse it for me;' and as he spoke he laid the babe gently in what he firmly believed were its mother's arms.

Was it so indeed? No one doubted it for an instant; yet no word of suspicion or mutual understanding was spoken

between them, as with a long-drawn sigh she clasped the child to her breast.

After the King and Lords had dined, and the woman and child been fed with such provisions as they had, Sir William de Courcy collected his followers; and old Humphry mounting his steed, the woman and child were helped up, and the little party set out. As they made their way through the forest, herds of red deer rose from the fern and bounded away, dashing into the depths of the wood; troops of long-tailed grey horses turned to gaze as they passed down the open glades; the red squirrels scampered in hundreds from the grounds where they were feeding, or peeped at them as they sat on the trees above their heads. Wild hogs, too, dashed by, for the wild hog of the New Forest is a different animal from the fattened and pampered occupant of the sty — lighter and more elegant in make, their bristles much darker, so that they gleam with an almost metallic lustre, which shows brightly

in the struggling sunbeams among the trees.

The troop passed through beechen groves and by the strangely gnarled and comparatively small forest oaks; though sometimes when they came to an open glade where individual trees had room to spread themselves, they would notice some giant of the forest left to develop as it would its wondrous growth. Before nightfall, Sir William de Courcy reached Dorsetshire, and at Wimborne Minster he halted, and placing the woman and child with one of the married hinds, was hospitably received with his followers in the Monastery. The next morning, after hearing mass and breakfasting with the good monks, they went on their way, which led them through Cranbourne Chase with its magnificent oaks. Entering Somerset, their route led them through the villages of Queen's Camel and West Camel, and past the hill fort of Cadbury.

The young squire, Henry de Louvelle,

whose name was a softened form of Lupellus or the little Wolf, rode by the Knight's side.

'You know this neighbourhood, De Louvelle, better than I. Surely we are near your father's Castle ?'

'Yes, my Lord, and near also to the spot hallowed by the traditions of the ancient inhabitants of the land ; for here is Camelot, King Arthur's magic Castle, which was raised by Merlin, so they say, in a single night.'

And there rose, close by, the huge mound of Cadbury, a mile in circuit. It had been originally constructed by the Belgic Britons ; and the strong fortifications Arthur, the Christian hero, had turned to good account in his conflicts with the heathen Saxons. By its peculiar arrangement of fosse and rampart, it bears witness to its original founders. The work at first of the Belgæ, it was improved and strengthened by the Romans ; but the Castle which crowned the hill and stood in

the centre of the twenty acres which form the summit was, if not built, at least fortified and adorned by Arthur and his Britons. They were valiant men and skilled soldiers, who had been trained under Aurelius Ambrosius, Arthur's uncle, who had learned the art of war from the Romans themselves. Cadbury Mount therefore remains to this day a record of the successive races who have ruled our land.

'And this is Camelot!' said Sir William de Courcy. 'Thou art fond of legends and tales; canst thou tell one as we ride together?'

'I fear me I am no minstrel, my Lord; the tales are told mostly in ballads sung to the harp by Welsh bards. It is said that when Arthur, who had fought the heathens in foreign lands, who had conquered France, and held his court in Paris, was at last called home to defend his own land from the Saxon invaders, he chose this as the spot from whence to oppose them. Here, at Camelot, in his magic Castle, he gathered

all the wisest, noblest, and most valiant knights in his dominions; and strengthening the ancient defences, he kept the country free from all invaders, so that as long as he lived no Saxon pirate dared to enter our summer-land, and Ynis-wytren, as it was called by the Britons, was virgin soil. Besides Camelot, which was the most strongly fortified because the most exposed to attack, Arthur had two other strong positions, besides his birthplace of Dundagel. These were Caerleon-on-Usk, and St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall. These two, with Camelot, made a sacred triangle, within which, during Arthur's lifetime, the barbarians could never penetrate.'

'I have heard somewhat of these tales. Where didst thou learn them?'

'At Castle Cary, sir, minstrels were ever welcome; and the lays of our own country, though inhabited by a different race, were ever most in request, for Castle Cary still retains its British name and its ancient traditions.'

'And what became of Arthur?'

'Ah, my Lord, it is a sad tale. Arthur was a Christian hero; but, in spite of his chivalry, his Knights of the Round Table——'

'What! the one at Winchester?'

'So they say, sir; but the Table was not set up there. The Chapters of the Knights were held at Caerleon-on-Usk, or here at Camelot; for the Round Table was given to Arthur by Leodogran, father of Guinevere and Prince of Cameliard, who, at his death, left his dominions to Arthur, his son-in-law. It was here that Arthur established his celebrated order of chivalry, so famous that none since then has ever outshone its glory. No one of the order was accounted higher than another, but the whole hundred and fifty were held as equal, and Arthur himself had no seat exalted above the others. All the Knights were of noble birth, and all of pure and stainless lives.'

'Alack!' said De Courcy, 'where should we find such now? But go on with thy tale.'

'Well, my Lord, the legend goes on to say that one day, Arthur himself being absent, when the Knights were seated in the great hall of the Castle at Camelot, a vision was vouchsafed of the Sangreal, or sacred chalice from which our blessed Lord drank when He instituted the holy sacrament of His body and blood the night before His crucifixion. This cup had been brought to Glastonbury by Joseph of Arimathea, and was kept there; but when ancient piety decayed, it was, for men's sins, caught away out of sight, and only appeared at times, and then only to such as were of pure life and conversation. At the appearing of this vision the assembled Knights took a solemn vow to engage in the quest of the Sangreal; but when Arthur returned, he bitterly lamented the vow, which he knew would prove a vain search after wandering fires, and would break up the noble fellowship of Knights, and mar the gallant struggle in which they were engaged. And as he feared, so it

proved, for this noble band never met together in life again. It is said that at Whitsuntide those who venture here at nightfall may hear the tramping of the horses, the clashing of armour, and the sounds of combat, as if Arthur's Knights were fighting over again that last tournament which was held here, ere they set out on the disastrous quest of the Sangreal.'

'And Arthur, what became of him?'

'Alas! my Lord, ill rumours arose with regard to the Queen and Launcelot. Then treason reared its head. Arthur's nephew rebelled against him, and Arthur fell, fighting against his own people, in his fair land of Lyonnesse, which since then has hidden its shame under the sea, and St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall, which was then the hoar rock in the wood, is now twice a day an island.'

'And was he buried there?'

'No. The legend goes on to say that a fairy barge conveyed Arthur to Yniswytren, or Glastonbury; and there he rests,

until, as an ancient prophecy declares, "he shall arise one day, with his sword Excalibur, chase away the perfidious Saxons, and restore the ancient British line."'

'Thanks, De Louvelle, for beguiling the way with thy minstrel talk; but surely they do not show Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury. I have been there often, and have never seen it.'

'No, my Lord; that Arthur was buried at Glastonbury seems certain, but, like that of Moses, no man knoweth his sepulchre to this day. It is believed by those who do not hold that he is in Fairyland, that he was buried in great privacy, in order that the Saxons might not find his tomb and insult his remains. It is said, moreover, that the knowledge of the exact spot has been handed down to the present day to two or three, who were bound under solemn oaths never to reveal the secret while the Saxon ruled the land.'

'Then it may hap that the secret may

one day be revealed now that Angevins and Normans are lords here.'

'Yes, my Lord; there is no doubt that if any Britons do exist who know the spot, they may reveal it now without fear of forswearing themselves.'

Just then up rode one of the attendants.

'May it please you, my Lord, the woman faints; she can scarce keep herself in the saddle, and old Humphry has to carry the babe himself.'

The Baron de Courcy could not help smiling at the notion of old Humphry on horseback with a babe in his arms, and a woman clinging on behind. Yet what was to be done? He looked helplessly at his squire. In answer to the Knight's look, young De Louvelle said:

'We are close to one of my father's outlying farms, sir, and honest John of Shotwell and his wife will look after the woman and child, if you can arrange to pass the night at Castle Cary.'

Sir William was only too thankful for

the suggestion, and the youth at once took command of the whole affair, with that delight at finding himself of importance that a young man always feels. He carefully superintended the carrying in of the fainting woman; he had some friendly words for John and Margery, who were charmed at doing a service for their young master; he sent on his own personal attendant to give notice to his father of the advent of the party; he himself took the babe from old Humphry's arms, and laid it in a cradle, which a lost child of Margery's had once occupied. Then, giving promises of substantial reward, which John and Margery both declared they did not look for, he went back in high spirits to Sir William, and acted as guide to Castle Cary, which was only a mile or two distant.

It is needless to say that they were hospitably received, though Sir William de Louvelle rather wondered, and was inclined to show symptoms of satirical doubt at the

explanation of the care lavished upon a foundling babe and a peasant woman.

'We act by the King's orders,' said Sir William; 'and I am desired not to leave the woman and child till I have placed them in the care of the Lord Abbot of Glastonbury. I fancy some remorse touched the King when he considered that more land had been afforested, more poor turned out of their homes by his own orders. 'Tis a lovely child, too! So fair it looked as it lay there, all unconscious of how its fate was being decided. I thought of mine own boy, and——'

Sir William de Louvelle interrupted him by saying how glad he was of any chance that gave him the pleasure of entertaining his son's patron, etc., etc. 'It gives us also an opportunity of seeing our boy, and hearing from you of his progress in all knightly exercises.'

The young squire was a great favourite with De Courcy, but he was not overmuch given to praise; so he said, laughing:

'There is no doubt about one knightly virtue that he possesses, viz., succouring the distressed; for what I should have done without him to-day, or how I should have disposed of the woman and child, I can scarce tell.' Then, noticing that young De Louvelle had taken the opportunity of leaving the room whilst his father and the Knight were conversing, he added: 'You may be at ease about him; he showed readiness of resource, clearness of head, common-sense and tenderness to-day. Whether he is destined to make a figure in the world time will show, but he has the making of a wise and a good man in him, and I could not wish more for my own boy when he comes to his years.'

News was brought the next morning that the woman was sufficiently recovered to proceed on her journey; and she so earnestly desired there might be no delay, her great wish being to find herself at Glastonbury, that the young squire, to whom the decision was left, could find no

excuse for remaining. He reported that, though no word could be extracted from Maude Heatherington on any other subject, yet with regard to the journey to Glastonbury, and the not being separated from the child, she spoke with passionate eagerness. It was necessary, however, to send forward a messenger to ask the Abbot's permission to enter his domains, and this formality would make it impossible to proceed that day. With his father's approval, Sir William de Courcy commissioned his young squire to ride on to Glastonbury, explain their errand, and obtain the Abbot's sanction to their visit.

Meanwhile the two Knights beguiled the time by visiting the Castle and examining its defences, which had been severely tested in the late civil wars. They compared the relative merits, as a defence, of the stone walls of a Norman castle, and the vast earthworks of the ancient Belgic fortress; and this led Sir William de Courcy to relate how young De Louvelle

had beguiled the way with legends of Arthur and Camelot.

'Ah!' said Sir William de Louvelle, 'old Father Morgan had a great store of ancient ballads and romances with which he was wont to amuse the boy; and if Welsh or Breton bard strolled this way the good Father ever prayed for their admittance; so that I believe the lad knows every legend of Arthur and his Knights that has been said or sung.'

After the young man's return from his expedition with the Lord Abbot's courteous invitation to Sir William de Courcy to visit the Monastery, and remain as long as would suit either his pleasure or convenience, he accompanied his mother on a visit to Shotwell to see the woman and child. And as he led his mother's palfrey he discoursed happily to her of all he had seen and done in his last campaign in France, from which, indeed, he had but just returned.

The woman had temporarily revived,

but there was a hectic flush on her cheek and a glitter in her eye that were signs of the fever that at once gave her unnatural strength for the present, and yet was consuming her vital power. All she had suffered from oppression, exposure, and famine had sapped her strength and left her no power to resist disease. The lady gently tried to persuade her to rest awhile before they proceeded to Glastonbury, but she answered:

'I have sworn a solemn oath never to leave the child till it is in safe custody, and I may not rest till I see him there.'

Every arrangement that was possible was made for her comfort, and the next morning the little troop set out once more, John and Margery almost weeping at parting with the child that had seemed to replace their own.

Old Humphry resumed his charge, and before long Henry de Louvelle told the Knight that they were entering the Abbey lands. It scarce needed the telling. Well-

drained meadows, with cattle feeding peacefully; apple-trees bending beneath their load of russet, golden, and crimson fruit; orchards containing trees of various sorts—pear, fig, plum, cherry, and different species of nuts; yellow corn being gathered into sheaves; large barns waiting to receive the harvest. All this, in addition to the prosperous and cared-for look of the peasantry, with their comfortable cottages and sunburnt children, gave a general air of content and prosperity. The villeins were directed in their work by lay-brothers, who were always ready to lend a hand themselves; and amongst the meadow-lands were broad meres well stocked with fish to serve the Monastery on fasting days.

As they rode on they met retainers of the Abbey, dressed in grave but handsome liveries; and the manner in which they spoke to the peasantry was different indeed from the rude and imperious way in which these were addressed by the re-

tainers of the nobles. No men-at-arms or servants, either of the Abbey or its numerous visitors, were allowed to leap over fences or break down hedges, or in any way to oppress or injure the cultivators of the land, and every man could make sure of enjoying the fruit of his labours.

Glastonbury, unlike most of our great monastic foundations, owes none of its interest to the beauty of its situation. It was originally founded on an island rising from the estuary of the little river Brue, the clearness of whose glassy waters won for it its ancient British name of Ynis-wytren, or the Glassy Isle. Its alternative name of Avalon is derived from its apple orchards.

As the party drew nearer to the Abbey, the meadow-lands passed into the Home Park, adorned with fine trees and well-kept lawns. The Abbot's garden was stored with rare herbs and plants from foreign climes, which were cultivated for medicine or kitchen use; but these were tastefully

interspersed with flowers of rare beauty, which were scarce yet to be found in any noble dame's parterre.

The monastic buildings rose fair and stately; of massive Norman work, they had just been almost entirely rebuilt under the splendid rule of Henry of Blois. This great prelate held together two of the richest pieces of ecclesiastical preferment in the kingdom, the Bishopric of Winchester and the Abbey of Glastonbury; and yet, though so great a pluralist, so wise and beneficent was his rule, that looking back through the vista of seven hundred years, we can scarcely dare to censure him.

The Hospital of St. Cross still remains to attest his magnificent benevolence at Winchester. But of all the buildings he raised at Glastonbury, none are now left but the ruins of St. Mary's (now called St. Joseph's) Chapel. The other remains belong to a later date, certainly not earlier than the reign of Henry III.

It was in the time of his uncle and god-

father, Henry I., when yet quite a youth, that Henry of Blois was made Abbot of Glastonbury; but, though so young, he was learned, grave, pure in life, wise, and gentle. The only fault ever laid to his charge was the facility with which he changed sides during the troubles of Stephen's reign. His whole soul was devoted to the Church, and when either of the contending parties trenched upon her rights or revenues, straight he made such terms with the other as would preserve her from plunder or oppression. Each side in turn bid high for the support of this powerful prelate, and seemed to prosper or the reverse as they kept or lost it. Against his conduct as both Abbot and Bishop no word of censure was ever uttered.

Placed when young in so important a post as Abbot of the oldest and richest monastery in England, if not in Europe, he reformed the manners of the monks, restored ecclesiastical discipline, renewed the buildings, enriched the library with rare

and valuable works, and rebuilt St. Mary's Chapel, so as to enclose the Vetusta Ecclesia, or ancient wattled church—built by the hands of St. Joseph and his twelve companions—the most ancient church in Britain. He made the Abbey a school of learning for rich and poor, and protected everyone, from the highest to the lowest dependent, on the spacious domains which owned his rule.

As the Baron and his party arrived in the precincts of the Abbey, they were met by a retainer, who courteously invited them to the Abbot's lodgings, called the Castle ; and whilst the servants of the Abbey took charge of the attendants, the Knight and his squire were ushered into the presence of the Abbot himself. Henry of Blois was seated in the hall in which he was accustomed to receive his guests ; he cordially welcomed the Lord de Courcy, asking him of his errand, which was more fully explained. He then caused the woman and child to be summoned.

'My cousin, Henry Plantagenet, then,' said the Abbot, 'asks that I will permit this child to become an inmate of the Monastery, to be brought up here, but not professed.'

'Yes, my Lord, that is his desire, he himself being answerable for all the expenses of his nurture and maintenance.'

'I see,' said the Abbot; 'and for the woman, does she return to the forest?'

Maude Heatherington had been turning her wild eyes from one to the other; suddenly she fell on her knees, and grasping the Abbot's robe, shrieked rather than said:

'No, no, my Lord! Henry of Anjou, the King, gave me his word that the child should not be taken from me. Turn me not out, my Lord! 'Tis not for long. It is little I ask, and not for long—not for long!' she murmured; and still she clasped the babe tight to her breast, as though she feared he would be torn from her.

'Give the child to me,' said the Abbot;

and he took him from her reluctant arms and gave him the kiss of peace.

The child opened its fine eyes, and looking full in the Abbot's face, he crowed and laughed.

'And yet you cast this fair child away,' said he, looking sternly at the woman.

'I could not see my child die. Alas! I have betrayed myself,' she said.

'Nay, woman,' said the Baron, 'thou didst that long ago.'

'Fear not,' said the Abbot; 'thou shalt not be separated from thy child; we will care both for him and thee.'

At these words the tension of her faculties relaxed; she loosed her hand from the Abbot's robe, slid lower still, and, before she could be raised, fell, apparently lifeless, at his feet.

'Bear her to the infirmary,' said the Abbot; 'it is but a faint. Desire Brother Gregory to see to her, and Sister Margaret to attend her.'

Two lay-brothers took her up and bore

her to the infirmary. There she was tenderly received by nursing sisters, and had such comforts as neither knight nor baron possessed in those days, but which were lavished upon the poor whom the sisters tended, for they remembered the Lord's words, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

There were symptoms of amusement at the position of the Abbot, with the babe in his arms; but he checked it by desiring the attendance of two sisters, who took the child.

'For,' said he, 'the poor woman will be clean distraught if she recovers and does not see the babe.'

And now the Abbot was able to give his attention to his guests, and he asked De Courcy as to how far there was any special reason for the King's interest in the child.

'None, as I think, save the fact that he had barely missed slaying the child, and the discovery of the distress that this fresh

afforesting of land by his own order had just caused. He has a keen eye, and wherever he goes he sees signs of the cruel devastation caused by the late wars. Ah! my Lord, it is only the Church lands that one sees in such a state of cultivation and good order as your domains.'

'And,' said the Abbot, 'had I given way to my brother or the Empress, would the lands be as they are? But now that a reign, as I trust, that promises peace has begun, at least each baron in his own lordship may do much.'

'Yes,' said the Knight doubtfully, 'it may be so; but with the elements of strife in France, in Wales, and in Scotland, what chance is there that any of us will be allowed to bring up his own son? There is my little Jack, not much older than the babe brought here to-day. If, as it may well be, that I die a soldier's death, I would ask you, my Lord, to remember that it is my earnest wish that my boy may be trained up in godly learning, before he takes to the

trade of war. Let him know that his father helped to rescue the little lad that you have taken in charge. I would have them friends.'

'I will not forget, De Courcy; but I am not a young man, and others may have to carry out your wishes. You know well, too, that though Glastonbury is my rest and my home, it is at Winchester that must ever lie my hardest work.'

'I know it, my Lord; and I also know how little any of us can forecast what is best for those we love; but I can scarcely say how much I dread my boy growing up a mere man of blood, a ruffian soldier, or almost worse still, a dissolute courtier. I have not forgotten my uncle's death. He was one of that gay company that perished with Prince William in the *White Ship*. I would have my boy godly and manly.'

The Abbot Bishop was much touched with the earnestness of the Baron, and it seemed to him that he spoke as one with a strong presentiment of evil, or at least of

coming death. He assured De Courcy in language as earnest as his own that if it were given him to do so, he would watch over both the boys with a fatherly care.

The Knight was making his adieux, preparatory to setting forth on his journey home, when there came a message for the young squire, Master Henry de Louvelle, that the woman, Maude Heatherington, would fain see him before he left.

'And Father Gregory thinks that she is passing,' said the lay-brother who brought the message.

'Go then at once,' said De Courcy; 'and if my Lord Abbot will permit me, I will await your return.'

Henry de Louvelle hastened to the infirmary. A great change had passed over the woman. She could scarcely speak.

'Young sir,' and her words were interrupted by gasps for breath, 'I have brought my child here, where I have so longed to place him. I have no fear but that he will be tenderly cared for and

well nurtured. Moreover, the King has promised to befriend him; but in years to come those who have known him and taken interest in him will have passed away. You are young. He will be nameless, landless. Be to him as an elder brother. Shield him from harm; train him as you have been trained, to be a Christian, God-fearing man, pious and gentle. Will you do this? Will you remember these last few days in years to come?'

'I will,' said De Louvelle.

'You will not forget this promise to a dying woman?'

'Never, so help me God!' and De Louvelle placed his hand upon the infant's head. 'He shall be to me, as he grows up, as a cherished younger brother.'

'Now I can go in peace,' she said; 'now all is well.'

The priest came forward; he held the crucifix before the dying woman; he recited the last Office; young De Louvelle and the nursing sisters knelt. The woman's

faint sobs and gasps were heard; occasionally by a word or two she joined in the prayers, and the unconscious babe slept. The death-struggle began; the Father uttered the commendatory prayer, still he held the crucifix in sight. She gave one earnest passionate look at the babe, another at the sacred emblem, as if to commend him to the care of her Lord; then, with a faint attempt at joining her hands in prayer, the wearied spirit fled.

For a few moments they knelt on as the priest commended the departed spirit to the Father's care—to the love of the Redeemer, and the companionship of saints and angels; then, rising, he turned to Henry de Louvelle, who had been much moved, and said:

'Your knighthood will be all the purer, your manhood all the nobler, my son, for the pledge you have this day given. May God give you grace to keep your word in spirit and in truth!'

'Amen,' said the young man, and kissing

the child's brow, he left the room with grave and solemn thoughts.

It was too late now to reach Stoke Courcy that night, and they passed an interesting and instructive evening in the company of the Abbot, conversing on the improved state of England, now that civil war had ceased. They discussed the novelties and improvements brought home by the Crusaders, showing how those who went out to fight in the wars of the Lord brought back the blessings of peace to their own country; for through the Crusades were introduced into Europe the study of mathematics, precious MSS., both religious and secular, new plants, fruits, drugs, and flowers. Everything, in short, betokened a long and prosperous reign, with, as a consequence, peace, prosperity, and advancement.

'Everything save one,' said De Courcy.

'And that is?'

'The manners of the Court,' answered the Baron.

Later in the evening they were joined by Father Gregory, as Sir William de Courcy was anxious to know whether there was anything to tell the King with regard to the child's parentage. To their astonishment the Father said that though he was bound by the seal of confession not to make known the child's real birth, yet that Maude Heatherington positively denied being his mother. She had been the attendant of a Saxon lady of large possessions, who had been forced into a union with a Norman knight, whilst her heart was given to one of her own race. The lady had had a sad and joyless married life. Her husband cared for naught but her lands. He had taken King Stephen's side in the wars; had been stripped of everything, as the western counties were mostly on the side of the Empress; his property had been destroyed, his castle razed. They had gathered together what they could of their former possessions, and made themselves a home in one of the outlying farms

on her estates, when King Henry's order had come to afforest more land, selecting the property of those who had fought for Stephen. The farm on which they were living was laid waste, and they were cast out homeless and penniless into the world.

Just before this happened, a child, a blessing denied to them in the time of their prosperity, was born. The father, crushed with bitter grief and mortification, died. He only lived to bless his child, and ask his wife's forgiveness for his former cruelty and neglect.

How the two women managed to support life and nourish the babe she could scarcely tell. They must have starved, but that one of the hinds received them into his hut. But the lady sank under the accumulated load of sorrow, entreating Maude Heatherington with her last breath to adopt the child, and never to make known his name and lineage. For some time she struggled on, and though the child never wanted, she had barely enough

to support life. Then, when every means failed, she determined to trust to God's mercy, and laid him where some of the royal hunt must needs pass.

'With what result,' said Father Gregory, 'you already know.'

''Tis a piteous tale,' said the good Baron. 'May God grant that such troubles be now over.'

'Amen,' said the Lord Abbot.

CHAPTER II.

STOKE COURCY AND THE BATTLE OF RHUDDLAN.

Sir William set out the next morning for Stoke, and as they wended their way, the scene gradually changed from rich flat meadows and luxuriant orchards, to the less fertile but far more picturesque scenery of North Somerset: and at last came in sight the strongly fortified Norman castle then recently built, but of which the ruins only now remain. At the Castle-gate stood Lady de Courcy, holding by the hand her two little daughters, Alice and Mabel, with her maidens behind her, while the old Norman nurse (for no Saxon was allowed to touch De Courcy's heir) bore their boy high in her arms.

A fair and noble child he was, large-limbed, and with a full, strong voice. In his father's absence he had learned to say 'Pap-pa,' and triumphantly did he shout it out, as he saw the train approach: again and again sounded out 'Pap-pa,' in a full, deep, unchildlike voice, to the delight and amusement of father, mother, and nurse.

De Louvelle leaped from his steed to hold the Knight's horse as he alighted, but De Courcy was beforehand with him, and had already dismounted, and folded his wife and little girls in his arms. Then, turning to his boy, who was still endeavouring to attract his attention by vociferating 'Pap-pa,' he took him in his arms.

'But how the child has grown, Lucie, and what a noble boy it is!'—for in his mind he was contrasting the magnificent development of his own child with the slightly made and small-limbed charge of poor Maude Heatherington.

Now it was not to be supposed that the man-at-arms, who had been sent on the evening before to give notice to the Lady de Courcy of her lord's approach, would not gossip about the curious fact of Lord de Courcy having had a woman and child in his train for several days; of the woman's death, and the child being left at Glastonbury. And the story had been improved upon, till a very curious and in no way correct version came up to Lady de Courcy's bower-maiden, and was recounted by her with comments and improvements, so that it was not wonderful that it became a tale which astonished Lady de Courcy considerably. When, therefore, Lord de Courcy expressed surprise at the growth of his boy, it struck her directly—which was really the fact—that he was comparing him in his own mind with the child he had recently been so strangely in charge of; and she answered coldly:

'Are you a judge of young children, my

Lord? Your experience must have improved since I saw you last.'

Lord de Courcy noticed a cloud on his lady's brow. He was wise, however, and not appearing to mark it, answered gravely:

'It has, and sadly, Lucie; you shall hear the tale as soon as we have had our meal. The saints preserve our boy from such a fate!'

He bore his son proudly and fondly in his arms, and the child appeared to rejoice at being in his father's firm grasp. Refreshments were prepared, and after they had partaken of them, Lord and Lady de Courcy seated themselves in the comparatively retired position of a recess formed by a turret; and there he told his story.

Lady de Courcy spoke some few words of slight sympathy, but she was a proud woman, and it seemed strange to her, such tenderness towards a foundling.

'He will be brought up at Glastonbury, and professed there, doubtless,' she said.

'It may be so; but I fancy that will

depend upon the boy himself. Ha, De Louvelle! what sayest thou of thy young charge?'

'As you say, my Lord, it must depend upon himself; but I certainly would not promote it.'

'Ah! you, like Lady de Courcy, think nought worth following but arms.'

'Arms, and lady's love,' said De Louvelle, with a modest blush.

'And yet you say you know nought from your own experience of this last.'

'No, my Lord; it may be my misfortune, but I have set my ideal so high that I have seen none to equal it but my own mother, and——' he bowed to Lady de Courcy; 'nevertheless, if I am to keep my vow to poor Maude Heatherington, it will not be by recommending a cloister life. If, as I trust, I may be a belted knight ere then, I would fain have that boy as my page, and give to him such lessons as I have learned from you.'

In spite of the pretty implied compli-

ment to herself, Lady de Courcy's lip turned with pride, as she said:

'We shall then have to look farther afield for some one to whom to entrust our boy.'

'That may or may not be, madam; I could scarcely have dared to hope that you would have counted upon entrusting your son to me; but a knight can have more than one page.'

'Thanks, Master de Louvelle, but our boy shall at least associate with his equals.'

De Louvelle bowed, and asked permission to retire; and soon afterwards was seen carrying De Courcy's heir on his shoulder, with the little girls frolicking around him.

'Ah, Lucie!' said her husband, 'when will you see that nobleness lies but in great deeds? and that as our ancestors rose by them, to despise those who rise is but to despise our own progenitors.'

'It is a strange new doctrine you teach, William,' she said, more gently.

'No new doctrine, Lucie; only the old,

old one. What were the saints? Nay, what was the blessed Jesus Himself on earth?'

'You then, my Lord, descended, and not remotely, from the royal race of Charlemagne, you think nothing of your noble ancestry!'

'Much, much, Lucie; more, it seems to me, than you do. I honour them for the qualities that made them great—for the position that they won, and which I inherit; but I owe it to them to show that I am in some respects worthy of them.'

'Ah, my Lord! there I grant you.'

'And I also owe it to them to show that I do not despise the position from which they sprang. No,' he said, raising his hand to check his lady, who was going to speak; 'Lucie, I lay it upon you as my most sacred command, that our boy be brought up as a noble knight's son, as a brave man should be trained. But let his pride of nobility be mingled with purity; his knightly deeds with gentleness and

love; and if, as is likely enough, I may not live to see my son what I desire, I would have him mingle with his equals in age in a way that his pride of birth should but lead him to emulate and outstrip them by noble deeds. If Glastonbury be what it is now, let him be much there, to learn holiness and purity of life, so as to give him strength to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh—God's enemies as well as the King's. And when you are seeking for husbands for our little maids, seek for noble, God-fearing men of good repute, rather than ancient lineage or large possessions.'

'William,' said the lady, laying her white hand on his, 'you are changed. What is it?'

'I know not, Lucie; unless it be the grief I feel to see that the King's stern sense of justice, his determination to put down lawlessness, is not all, nor half all we want. The Court! Ah, Lucie! it is not fit a pure woman should even know what

it is! I have been with the King on his rapid journeys from one end of England to the other, and I know that his advent is dreaded as much as King Stephen's or the Empress's with their foreign mercenaries. All know what the Queen was, and he——'

'Ah, he! William, I can feel neither honour nor loyalty for one who betrayed the sweet Rose of Canyngton—for his wife she was, or thought herself so; that I know. What has become of her, the poor child?'

'She disappeared as soon as Queen Eleanor set foot in England. It is said by some that she is in Godstow Nunnery. Thus much is certain, that as soon as she knew the King had married another she left him, and refuses to see him.'

'Alas! alas! sweet Rosamond! how fair she was!'

'Fair indeed! and the worst is that the courtiers must needs follow the example of the King and Queen; and I fear me that

some day a heavy reckoning will come, and then what will the end be? Sweet my wife, use your influence to make our boy such a knight as they sing of in the days of Arthur.'

'May he be such a knight as his father!' said the wife softly.

'Ah, Lucie! I know full well I am not your knightly ideal. You think me too weak and womanish.'

'No, no, my Lord. May God grant that you may live and bring up our boy, and make him such as you are!' and she laid her beautiful head upon his shoulder, and, for the time, Lady de Courcy believed in her lord.

Yet it astonished her much to see the change in him; every duty was so diligently performed. An indolent old chaplain, who had let things go easily, was pensioned off, and placed in a neighbouring and not too strict monastery; and Father Clement from Glastonbury, strongly recommended by the Abbot, was put in

his stead. Yet it was not that he was always grave; he encouraged the people in their sports, he joined at times in the dance when the great hall was cleared; but above all and beyond all was his exquisite tenderness to their children. As for the boy, he was never so happy as when in his arms. He was certainly not cast in his father's more gentle mould, but had his mother's spirit—was daring to a degree, never cared how high he was tossed, delighted to see his father in armour, and if he went out, always claimed to ride in front of him on his saddle as far as the farthest bound of their estates, and fiercely resented being handed to and carried back by his nurse.

It was a peaceful, happy time. Lady de Courcy entered more and more into her husband's mind, and often did they forecast the future of their boy; Lord de Courcy constantly impressing upon his wife his wishes concerning his children, in a way that made her fear and wonder; but, as he

said, 'No one could tell what might befall.'

In the autumn came a summons from the King; troubles had broken out in the North of Wales, and Henry was about to lead an army against the Welsh in person. Sir William de Courcy recalled his squire from his rather lengthened home-visit. De Louvelle did not fail on his way to call at Glastonbury, and bring news of little William Bruyère. He was a great darling, able to run alone, dark-eyed and intelligent. They taught him to call De Louvelle 'brother,' sometimes 'brother Henry.'

'Till,' he said, 'I do not feel sure that the urchin does not consider me a cloistered monk, in spite of my secular dress.' The Abbot, he said, was away, having gone to reside awhile at his palace at Bankside, in Southwark.

The young squire was bright and alert, hoping to win his spurs in the campaign. The preparations were already in a forward

state, the men being collected together; the farewells were spoken, and the troop was ready.

The Baron de Courcy was bidding his wife adieu. It was the most loving farewell he had ever had. Hitherto he knew, or rather felt, that his wife had held him cheap; but now she had learned to know more really what he was. Fondly she clung to him as he embraced his children. He held his boy in his arms, blessed him, and, as he returned him to her, he said:

'Lucie, I commend our babes to you, and you to them, and both to our Lord and the saints.'

'And you, William, my dear, dear Lord, may God be with you.'

One last embrace, and the Lord de Courcy turned away and joined his troop. At Bristol they met the King, and set northwards by forced marches.

There was no great display of strength, for the wild Welshmen were not looked upon as formidable antagonists, and Henry

strove to impress them at first by the rapidity of his movements. They had made one of their raids in the north during the King's absence in Brittany, where he was beginning the evil destiny of the Plantagenet Kings by warring against his brother Geoffrey. He had sworn to his father, Geoffrey of Anjou, that, should he ever succeed to the English throne, he would yield his patrimony of Maine and Anjou to his brother; but the second Henry only exaggerated the evil qualities of his maternal grandfather, and, as old Stowe mildly puts it, 'was unsteadfast of promise.'

Geoffrey, finding that he could not secure his father's inheritance, seems to have endeavoured to seize one elsewhere. He was, however, overcome, and Henry hurried back to England on hearing of the insurrection in Wales. He gathered a force together with all speed, and hastened northwards, hoping to come upon the enemy before they heard of his return.

The Welsh princes were, like all Keltic tribes, constantly warring against each other; and in this very contest Henry's fleet was commanded by Madoc-ap-Meredith, Prince of Powys-land. Henry was ever more successful in policy than in war, and when he found that the Welsh were already prepared for him, he delayed his march, restoring castles, cutting down forests, and making roads, and so gave them time to draw to a head. At last, in the valley of the Clwyd, under the walls of Rhuddlan Castle, the royal army came up with the enemy. The English army was composed of knights and their retainers hastily called together; they acted without concert, and becoming involved in the intricacies of forests and mountain passes, became separated, each baron being attended only by his own band of followers, whilst the Welsh, knowing every inch of the country, took advantage of every inequality in the ground, of every bend in a river, and could watch the movements of

the English without being themselves discovered.

Henry himself, with his own immediate followers, ever pressed on. They became entangled in the woods, and were set upon unexpectedly by the enemy. Whilst fighting his way through the hurrying crowd of half-savage Welsh, the King stumbled and fell. His foes uttered a shout of triumph, whilst Henry Earl of Essex, hereditary standard-bearer to the sovereign, calling aloud, 'All is lost!' flung down the standard, and fled. Another moment and it would have fallen into the hands of the enemy, but Sir William de Courcy sprang forward and seized it. A urious combat raged around it; the chivalry of England rushed forward to defend the banner, and the Welsh struggled hard for what they had believed to be within their grasp. Meanwhile, as the Baron de Courcy still held the banner, a Welshman glided amongst the tall Normans, and plunged his long knife into his

exposed side under his right arm. De Louvelle was by his Lord; he cut down the Welshman, seized the banner, and bestriding De Courcy's body, fought on, whilst the Earl de Montfort and Baron Fitz-John supported him, and, fighting furiously, rallied the men. The King with his own troop drove off the assailants, though not before Sir Geoffrey Fitz-John fell; but the battle was won.

The garrison of Rhuddlan had been constant in doing their best to assist the royal forces; but they had received strict orders on no account to sally forth, but to keep the Castle as a place of retreat for the King's army. The Welsh had fled, and De Louvelle asked permission to resign the standard to De Montfort, and bear his master within the walls of the Castle, that his hurts might be attended to.

He raised the Knight, unbraced his helmet, and removed it, to give him air. Death was but too plainly marked on his features.

'Move me not,' he said. Then, turning to the King: 'Sire, you will protect my wife and children; and this lad hath borne himself bravely.'

The King took his sword, as De Louvelle knelt by the Baron de Courcy.

'It was bravely done, young man, when others of so much older years set an example of flight. Thy name?'

'Henry de Louvelle.'

'Then, in the name of God and St. George, arise, Sir Henry de Louvelle; be brave and fortunate.'

The young Knight could not rise, for Sir William de Courcy's head was resting on his knee. He scarcely seemed to feel the accolade, but said:

'Oh, sir, to think of me at such a time!'

A mist was gathering over De Courcy's eyes.

'Give me water; and is a priest at hand?'

One appeared, bearing the last Sacraments of the Church. He made his shrift,

and received the consolation of the last offices from the priest. Then, appearing to gather fresh strength for a moment, he said faintly:

'De Louvelle, I ask from you, for my boy, the same promise you made to the poor woman who died at Glastonbury. He will not want friends, but, in as far as you can, promise to aid and counsel him, that he may be a Christian knight, man-like and God-like. My love, my dearest love, to my wife and girls. Kiss my boy for me. Ah! this is death! Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.' And the noble, gentle soul was breathed out.

The priest had been called away to attend on others, and for a few moments De Louvelle knelt on alone by his Lord's side; then rousing himself, he gave orders for the removal of his body to the Castle.

He was now summoned to attend the council being held, and desired to give such account as he could of the fall of the standard. De Montfort, who was a cousin of

the Earl of Essex, bore witness to having seen the standard dropped, and the flight of the Earl. He added also that he had stopped him, and urged him to return.

Then De Louvelle told of his Lord's rush to save the banner, and said that he was supported by Sir Geoffrey Fitz-John; but Sir Geoffrey was sore wounded, and was lying in a distant part of the Castle. Thomas à Becket, the King's Chancellor, was desired to see him. He brought word that he was not likely to recover, but confirmed the story already told, bore witness to the valiant manner in which De Louvelle supported his Lord, rescued the standard, and defended the Knight's body. He affirmed that 'never were spurs more nobly won.'

'And now,' said the King, 'there is much to be done. The Castle must be strengthened and the passes guarded.'

The young Knight was ordered to his post, and merely delayed to request the priest to see that all due honour was paid

to his Lord's remains. He had to put aside his own personal grief, consoled by the thought that both he and his master had done their duty.

When all was arranged for the safety and quiet of the country, and sentinels had been posted in all the passes, a solemn requiem was held in the chapel of Rhuddlan Castle for those who had fallen. The bodies of the two Knights (for the spirit of Sir Geoffrey Fitz-John had since passed away) were brought in and laid on biers in front of the altar; and thanksgiving for the victory and prayers for the dead were mingled together.

When the service was over, the Knights and nobles with their attendants departed. Sir Henry de Louvelle still knelt on. On being addressed by one of the priests, he made known his intention to watch fasting by his arms, as though still only an aspirant for knighthood, and to mingle prayers for the repose of his master's soul with earnest aspiration to keep his knightly vow and

discharge his high trust. All, even the priests, had left. Lights were burning at the head and feet of the corpses; with that exception but one solitary lamp lit up the darkness.

Long knelt the youthful Knight before the crucifix. He strove to remember his sins, and throw them, as it were, at the feet of his Redeemer. Then he bethought himself of his code of knightly duties, and of the sacred trust he had accepted as guardian and guide to the two children; and earnestly did he pray for purity of life and wisdom to fulfil his trust. After his hard fight and heavy work during the day, weariness most painful to combat stole over him. Anon he rose and paced the chapel, striving to fight against what seemed to him a temptation of the flesh and the devil, but was indeed but the natural effect of fatigue and hunger. Again he knelt and devoted himself to the service of God and the Church, and as he knelt he bowed his head on the steps of the altar. Did he

sleep? or was a vision vouchsafed to him?

By the side of the altar hung heavy and richly adorned curtains, and it seemed to him that behind these shone a glorious light. Dimly he saw the figure of Sir William de Courcy, his face ghastly pale and spotted with blood, as he appeared when he sank on his knees on the battle-field before he fell prostrate. By his side was an angel. It was the Angel of Death. One hand rested on the Knight's shoulder. With the other he drew aside the curtain, and lo! the light shone with an exceeding brilliancy, and lighted up his Lord's face as well as the angel's. And behold it was no longer the Angel of Death, but the Angel of Life he saw; and his Lord was no longer wounded, faint, and weary, but transfigured. He looked as if he saw a vision beyond the light—a vision of such exceeding beauty and delight that De Louvelle himself pressed forward to see. But the angel held up a warning finger.

'Thy work is not yet accomplished,' he seemed to say. 'Thou must remain and finish it. Let this vision stay by thee, and remember that if thy work is great, the Master who gives it thee to do can give thee strength to perform it.'

The curtain fell, the vision vanished, and De Louvelle found himself kneeling before the Master who would never leave him.*

At that moment he heard the sound of opening doors, and with a soft step Father Gervase came in to say the first mass. His first idea was the glorious, almost heavenly light that beamed from the young Knight's face; his next, anxiety almost amounting to fear at his wan and exhausted appearance. He entreated him at once to go and rest, but De Louvelle would not be denied making his confession and communicating with the priest. The good Father made the service as short as consisted with reverence, and then saw the

* The author trusts that it is unnecessary to remind the reader of Sir Noel Paton's allegorical picture of 'Mors Janua Vitæ.'

youthful Knight to his bed, bringing him food with his own hands.

A few days sufficed to settle matters in Wales. The Cymri had returned to their mountains ; and after garrisons had been set in the principal castles, and all due military precautions taken, Sir Henry de Louvelle obtained permission to bear the body of Sir William de Courcy back to Somerset, with the escort of the Knight's own troop ; and as they went on their way they heard at intervals the mournful strains of the plaintive Welsh dirge, 'Morfa Rhuddlan,' as parties of the mountaineers were carrying off the bodies of their princes and chiefs for interment. This was even then an ancient dirge, as it commemorated a defeat by the great Mercian King, Offa, on the same spot.

When he reached Bristol, De Louvelle gave orders to proceed at a slow pace, while he pressed on to Stoke to bear the first news to the Lady de Courcy. As he entered the village he met the seneschal

of the Castle, who hastened to him to hear his tidings.

'Let us find Father Clement,' said the old man; 'he had best be there when you tell our lady the grievous news;' and he turned away, too overcome to say more. Father Clement was sought.

'Alas!' he said; 'I feared it. And yet we should not grieve. When last at home, he seemed but ripening for a better world. The lady will take it hardly.'

At this moment the nurse came in sight with the children. The boy began his joyous shout of 'Pap-pa.' De Louvelle dismounted, and taking him in his arms, said:

'This little one shall tell the tale.'

He took the child, who now recognised him and called him by name, and stroked his armour, proud to be carried by so martial a figure. He desired the seneschal to ask an audience for him of the lady. The old man's face had told the story, and as he entered the hall Lady de Courcy was standing with one foot forward, her

hands clasped, her head raised, with a look of agonized expectation.

The young man was ushered in, still bearing the child in his arms. She could not speak. She strained her eyes, as looking beyond him.

'Madame,' he said, 'I bear a message to you from my Lord. He bade his dear love to you and his children. He commended you to the Lord and His saints.'

'And he—he—my dear Lord, where is he?'

'Madame, he is with them.'

The young Knight sank on one knee, as the lady, stiffened with horror, neither spoke nor moved. Then, clasping her hands over her head, she uttered a wild shriek that rang through the Castle. She stepped wildly towards him.

'And you—you—why could you not have saved him? You were his squire. You were bound to defend him. And there you are, pranked out in your new honours, without a wound, without a

scratch! And he, my Lord, dead! dead!'

'Madame, gladly would I have given my life for his!'

'Ah, so you say, but——Ah me! Ah me!'

One of her attendants brought her a chair, and with a gentle force they seated her in it. De Louvelle knelt before her.

'Dearest madame, his last thoughts were of you and your children! Will you not accept his last bequest?'

He placed the child on her lap. She bent over him, clasped him in her arms, and burst into tears.

'Now leave her,' said the good Father.

'You will stay with her?'

'No, my son; it is too soon to speak of consolation. Those tears and her children are the best comfort at present. By-and-by she will open her mind to a higher one!'

The Knight and the priest went out together, to make preparations for receiving

their Lord's body; and before the little band arrived with their precious burthen, all was in readiness.

Silently, hoping the lady might not hear, they passed to the chapel, but she was already there, prostrate at the foot of the Cross, and there let us trust she found comfort and peace.

CHAPTER III.

GLASTONBURY AND DE BRUYÈRE.

YEARS passed on; the proud and haughty Lady de Courcy had become meek and chastened in her widowhood; her whole ardent soul was thrown into love for her children, and above all for her eldest boy—for after her Lord's death she bore another son, called Jordan. But from her too anxious desire to retain his love, she indulged him in his every whim, and ill would it have fared with his training, but for Father Clement and the last wish of her husband, so earnestly impressed upon her, and constantly urged by the young Lord of Castle Cary. So, when the boy was eight years old, Sir Henry de Louvelle reminded

the Abbot of his promise, and arranged that he should be received at Glastonbury, to be brought up with the other lads under the wise training of Henry of Blois.

It was a great but wholesome change to the child. The regular discipline, the lessons enforced by the gentle yet firm authority of Father Laurence, the companionship of boys of his own age, the being obliged to obey without murmur or hesitation, and, above all, the having to yield to others, would have been irksome indeed, had he not been in some sort prepared for it by De Louvelle, who had always kept before him the ideal of his father.

It was strange that amongst the number of lads gathered at Glastonbury, sons of the highest families in the baronage of England, yet that William de Bruyère, in his ambiguous position, was ever the chosen companion of John de Courcy. It may be that the very difference in their characters and prospects made them the faster friends.

Will was naturally gentle, supple, and yielding, prone to look up and cling to those of stronger will than himself; while John was brave, self-reliant, and firm—perhaps obstinate, but, with the true instinct of manliness, ever ready to protect the weak.

Will was the darling and pet of the Abbey, but his gentle and affectionate nature shielded him from jealousy; yet it happened at times, that when the boys were talking of their fathers, their mothers, and their homes, Will would be sadly reminded that he had neither; and now and then some ill-conditioned lad would call him 'a child of the heather,' 'a foundling,' or even a worse name. But woe betide anyone who dared to cast up Will's orphaned state at him if John de Courcy were present. Even if he were half again as big as himself he would thrash him, and say that if Will de Bruyère had no father, neither had he; that it was *his* father who had brought Will there, and that he had said

he was to be a brother to him, and he should like to see any boy who *dared* to treat him badly. And so Will, the slight-limbed, dark-eyed child of the Abbey, and the large, strong, broad-shouldered lad with his wide acres and his royal blood, became fast friends and dear brothers in love.

For the rest, the boys at Glastonbury were much like other boys. They played, they studied, they attended the services in the Abbey church, they followed their games in the meadow-lands, they learned boating and swimming in the Brue, and when, in the winter, the marshes were frozen over, they slid on the shallow ice. No difference was made between them; the Baron's son and the foundling fared alike; the children of the hinds on the Abbey farms received religious instruction with the others, and, if they showed any talent or aptitude for learning, they had every opportunity given them of improving it. Amongst these boys of such different characters, ages, and position, John de

Courcy soon distinguished himself for his open, truthful character. Brave as a lion, he hated a lie and the teller of one, and detested everything mean and false.

The eldest of these boys was one Randal Lacy, cousin to Sir Hugh de Lacy, Earl of Chester and Count of the Marches; his father had been murdered by a Welshman, who had mistaken him for Sir Hugh; and though the elder Randal de Lacy had ever been a disgrace to the family, yet, in consideration of the manner of his death, his cousin had made himself responsible for the boy's education, trusting that by wise and holy nurture he might be trained to be a more worthy man. But the boy was of a close, mean disposition; he would in an underhand way suggest some doubtful scheme, and then, when the *dénouement* came, he always contrived to be elsewhere, or, at least, was able to show that he had had no participation in it—in fact, he constantly enacted the part of the monkey in the fable of the cat's-paw and the chest-

nuts. Such a character was, as may be supposed, odious to John de Courcy; and there was no love lost between them.

A raid on an orchard where the finest fruit was grown, which was generally reserved for the Abbot and the guest-table, was rather a favourite piece of mischief. This being proposed by some of the boys one evening, John de Courcy said, 'He cared not to rob or get anything by stealth; moreover, they had enough for their share.' He saw Randal wink at the other boys to be silent, and the subject dropped; but whisperings passed from one to the other. Will de Bruyère, who ever conned his tasks with John, was persuaded on some excuse to help a big dunce, whose seat was in another part of the room. John's mind was disturbed, besides that he missed the help of his quick-witted little friend, and his tasks were ill prepared. Just before bedtime Will stole up to him and said:

'I had much rather have been with you,

John, but Randal de Lacy said De Braose wanted help, and'—he whispered so that John had to bend low to hear him—'they want me to rob the orchard, John, because they say I can climb best, and Randal de Lacy said he would half kill me if I told you.'

John de Courcy knew no way of acting but the shortest and most direct; with one hand upon Will's shoulder, he strode up to Randal and said:

'De Lacy, I let you know that I will not have De Bruyère bullied; if you want the Abbot's fruit, get it yourself; but this child shall not steal the fruit while you keep out of the scrape—mean scamp that you are!'

Randal darted a furious look at Will, and then insolently asked John what he meant.

'Just what I say. If other boys are persuaded or bullied into mischief, I will just tell Father Laurence who is at the bottom of it. Will shall never be thrashed again to save your skin if I can help it.'

Again, in impotent fury, did De Lacy ask John what he meant.

'What I mean is this. The other day, when we were playing hide-and-seek, and some of us hid in the Scriptorium, where we had been ordered not to go, though you and Will had both been there, you let him be flogged, and managed to get out of it yourself. But I give you fair notice, I will not hold my tongue next time.'

The conversation, if such it could be called, was stopped by the boys being ordered off to bed. But the next day John was restless and disturbed; moreover, his tasks were ill prepared, and therefore ill said; and when the lesson-hour was over, and the others were all turned out to play, John drew on his devoted head the punishment of remaining in the schoolroom in solitude for an hour. In De Courcy's absence, the boys, secretly encouraged by Randal de Lacy, alternately tormented, threatened, and coaxed Will

de Bruyère, till he consented to climb the trees and throw the fruit down to them, Randal meanwhile keeping watch. But, lo! whilst Will was busily employed in the tallest tree, the warning whistle was heard, the boys melted away, De Lacy was nowhere to be seen, and, when he dropped from the tree, it was into the arms of Brother Giles, the lay-brother, whose business it was to superintend the orchards, and who was supposed to be safely engaged in attending to the cider-press.

The culprit was taken in the act, and Brother Giles, though sorry enough when he saw who it was, could only carry him at once before Father Laurence. He said, 'That fruit had constantly disappeared lately, and that it must be put a stop to.' All the boys were called in. Father Laurence told them that Will had been discovered robbing the Abbot's orchard; but it was almost certain that others were concerned in the affair, and that he hoped they would

confess and not leave Will alone to bear the punishment. No one spoke ; the boys were more afraid of Randal de Lacy's private torturings than of the good Father's punishments.

Father Laurence was perplexed. He knew well that if John de Courcy had been concerned in it he would have spoken out at once, and then he remembered that at the very time the robbery was committed, John was confined to the schoolroom. But when he said that De Bruyère must be birched in presence of the other boys, John de Courcy could not keep silence, and burst out with :

'If you ask Randal de Lacy, Father, I think he can tell you all about it.'

Now, Randal de Lacy never really expected that John de Courcy would turn informer. He turned alternately pale and red, both with anger and with the feeling that stood for shame with him. He cast a look of deadly malice at John, and said :

'I suppose he thinks so, Father, because

we were saying yesterday that he and De Bruyère were the best climbers amongst us; but as De Courcy was confined in the schoolroom, he of course knows nothing at all about it.'

The good Father scarcely knew what to do: he never listened to tales from one child of another; and it was very unlike John to do this. But after a moment's thought, he said:

'You, Randal, as the eldest, would of course have told me if you had been concerned in it; and I am told by Brother Giles that you were fishing in the mere. As it is, De Bruyère will be flogged, and De Courcy put in penitence for a week,'

'Father,' said John, 'I will be flogged instead of Will; they made him do it when I was away. I don't mind; or at least, not much,' he added, with that obstinate truthfulness that was part of his nature.

'No, John,' said Father Laurence; 'if the boys who tempted Will—if there are

such—can see him punished for their fault, their own thoughts will be a greater punishment than any I can give them. And Will must learn to stand alone; and you know I never listen to tales from one boy of another.'

Being kept in penitence meant having nothing but bread and water for a week, a punishment much more dreaded generally by the boys than a flogging, which, as they said, was soon over.

John said, after his week's punishment came to an end, that he deserved it, for thinking that any good could ever come of telling tales; and, after all, he had not saved Will from his flogging.

But the Father noted more than the boys thought; and very shortly afterwards Sir Hugh de Lacy was advised that it would be well that Randal should be placed as page in some knight's household: the youth was removed, but he never forgot the grudge he bore against John de Courcy.

It was in the autumn of the year 1165 that Lady de Courcy was summoned to Court, to give account of her stewardship of the Baronies of Courcy in Normandy and England, as guardian of her young son. She took with her her younger daughter, Mabel; Alice, the elder, being already married to Baldwin de Redvers, Earl of Devon and Wight. He was many years older than his young wife, who was scarcely more than a child, but he was a man of high character; and Lady de Courcy felt that in marrying her young daughter to so powerful and highly esteemed a nobleman, she was also providing a protector for her son in case of trouble. The youngest child, Jordan, remained with his nurse at Stoke, and John stayed at Glastonbury.

The damp, white fog rose from the marshes, and hung like a pall over the green meadows; the trees had lost the exquisite tints that marked the waning year, and were standing bare and leafless,

while the dead leaves which had already fallen to earth were helping in their decay to enrich the fruitful land. The Abbot-Bishop was either at Winchester or at his palace in Southwark, engaged in some of the multifarious duties belonging to his large and important diocese.

Christmas came ; the Lady de Courcy was still at Winchester, and not likely to return till after Easter. John de Courcy and Will de Bruyère were the only children left in the Abbey. Will, though he had lived in the Abbey from a time that dated farther back than his memory, had never spent so delightful a Christmas. The boys' outdoor amusements were necessarily curtailed ; but when they were not able to go fishing, boating, or sliding, Will was charmed to take John into parts of the Monastery strictly prohibited when the other boys were there ; and on a holy day, Father Dermot the sacristan would take them round the church, and with loving pride point out the treasures committed

to his charge. There was the Vetusta Ecclesia, the ancient wattled church, raised by the same holy hands that had laid the Lord's Body in the grave. There also was the small but lavishly adorned super-altar of St. David, called the 'Sapphire Altar,' from the magnificent stone that shone in its front. This had lain concealed since the times of Ethelred the Unréd, having been carefully hidden to preserve it from the ravages of the Danes; but it had been brought to light by the present Abbot in a searching investigation which he had caused to be made before he had begun his new buildings.

Father Dermot, also, would show them the tombs of the former abbots and saints; but when he came to the tomb of St. Patrick, he whispered to them that the saint's body did not rest there, but in his own cathedral-church of Doune, in Ireland. And then he would tell them how Ireland in old days had been called the Isle of Saints; and how, when the lamp of

learning was well-nigh extinguished in England by the Danes, it was lighted again by the torch brought from Ireland, by wise monks sent over as teachers in our schools and monasteries. 'The great and learned St. Dunstan, a native of Somerset like yourself, John, gained all the learning, science, and arts which made him so famous from Irish monks at Glastonbury.'

But the happiest times of all were the winter evenings, when, gathered round the log-fire, Will would coax Father Geraint to tell of the former fame of Glastonbury, before Saxon, Dane, or Norman had set foot in this western land. The Father was of royal British blood — nay, he claimed to be descended from Arthur's father, the great Uther Pendragon himself, and lovingly did he dwell upon the ancient glories of his race. He would tell the boys how gallantly the Britons opposed the great Cæsar, whom they forced to retire, though he enjoined

an annual tribute; but when, in the days of Cunobelin, the Romans sent to demand it, the ambassadors were bid to collect it if they dared.

Then came the tale of the sons of Cunobelin, Guiderius and Arviragus, who had been stolen in their childhood, and brought up in the woods, so that his daughter Imogen alone was left to him; but her husband being banished from Court, she went in search of him; and, whilst wandering in these same woods, met her brothers, and at last all Cunobelin's children were restored to him again. After the death of Cunobelin his father and Guiderius his brother, Arviragus became King; and it was in his time that Joseph of Arimathea and his companions were sent from Gaul by Philip the Apostle to the opposite shores of Britain, to make known the Gospel. They were warned by a vision not to stay their course till they saw a hill most like to Tabor's holy mount. Seeing the Tor rising nearly from

the edge of the waters, they shipped their oars, and the vessel, impelled by unseen hands, glided in and stayed its course at the foot of the hill. There the mouth of the river Brue mingled its waters with those of the Channel, and the Ynis-wytren, or Glassy Isle, rose as a green spot from the clear mirror-like lake. St. Joseph and his companions climbed Weary-all Hill, and, knowing that here at last was to be his resting-place, he planted the thorn he had himself taken from our Lord's brow and preserved with reverent and loving care. From this grew the famous thorn-tree, slips from which are eagerly sought in all the country round. Though it was difficult for them to find food and shelter, yet they told to all who would listen the sweet story of Jesus. Arviragus heard of their saintly lives; and though he would not himself give up his false worship, yet he allowed such of his subjects as chose to listen to their teaching, and granted them each a portion of land, ever since called

the 'Twelve Hides of Glastonbury.' And now, his wanderings over, he planted his walnut-staff on St. Barnabas's day. 'And there, John,' said Will, 'it is, close to St. Joseph's Chapel, which we pass every day when we go to church.'

And Father Geraint would gradually interweave with the ecclesiastical legends the story of Arthur, the perfect Knight and Christian hero.

'Arthur was a grand old fellow,' said John; 'and Sir Henry de Louvelle often tells me tales of him and the Knights of the Round Table; but I don't want to be like him, though Sir Henry is always telling me to try and be such a knight as he was.'

'And why not?' said Father Geraint.

'Because King Arthur was beaten in battle, and fought against by his own subjects, and betrayed by his friend.'

'Ah, John! and does not that make him only the more like our blessed Lord? Was not He deserted by His followers and

betrayed by His friend, and given up to death by His own people?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' said John reluctantly.

'And, John, a brave knight is not always victorious; a true knight should know how to suffer defeat, disgrace, and death.'

'Death!—oh yes! My father died on the battle-field,' said the boy proudly; 'but he was not disgraced. He died as a good soldier, in his armour, and Sir Henry de Louvelle gained his spurs when he seized the standard and defended my father's body. There was no shame or disgrace there.'

'There is no real shame save in evil deeds; yet what the world calls disgrace may come, and we must be willing to bear whatever cross may be laid upon us.'

Such was the teaching the boys had in Avalon's holy isle. They grew up, sometimes at home—for Stoke was almost as much Will's home as John's—sometimes at

Castle Cary, where they visited Sir Henry de Louvelle, and learned every legend that was sung or said, Belgic or British, ecclesiastical or secular. There they learned many a lay and romance of love and war, and often would the boys listen delighted to tales of King Arthur and his Knights, of Sir Percival the Stainless, and Sir Galahad the Pure, of Sir Tristram, and many another. They firmly believed in the wild romances of his conquests abroad and of his holding his Court in Paris. But when they came to the faithless Guinevere and Sir Launcelot, to the traitor nephew Mordred, and the last battle, then John would get impatient, and discover that he was wanted elsewhere. Sir Henry de Louvelle sighed and said:

'The lad's spirit wants chastening; but the good God will supply such discipline as is needful.'

CHAPTER IV.

FRANCE AND SIR TRISTRAM.

It was now time for the two boys to be enrolled amongst the followers of some knight as pages, and to learn their first lessons in chivalry. For a time Sir Henry de Louvelle received them both into his own household; but he soon found that De Courcy's ardent spirit wanted freer scope, and, with Lady de Courcy's sanction, he placed him under the charge of a valiant Knight of high character, who was going out to join the King's troops in Normandy. Eventually, when Prince Richard was sent to govern his mother's domains in Aquitaine, De Courcy was attached to his service, and preserved through life for him a strong personal affection.

Will de Bruyère remained for the time with Sir Henry de Louvelle ; but the King did not forget the child of the heather, but had him to Court and made him a companion to his own sons. The boy's singularly affectionate and flexible disposition made him glide easily through the mazes of Court intrigue ; and the religious and wholesome influence of Glastonbury and Castle Cary, both of which he constantly visited, kept fresh and pure the sacred sources of religion and truth. It was strange to note the tenderness (probably from some latent feeling of remorse) shown by the King to the foundling of the New Forest ; and perhaps still more remarkable was the fact, that, though a King's favourite, he never raised any feelings of envy or jealousy, but ever bore himself humbly and gently, so that in after-years it was said of him, 'That, though the minion of three Sovereigns, yet all the world embraced and loved him.'*

* Camden.

De Courcy, meanwhile, was being trained in a far different school. Brave, active, and self-reliant, he soon made his mark, and learned the art of war and the science of arms. He was not formed, like De Bruyère, to win the regard of many; he made but few friends, but those he loved with an intensity of affection which was enthusiastically returned.

Among the youths who were serving, like himself, under knights of character and fame, was a certain Almeric de Tristram. He was of singular beauty, brave withal and pious, and endowed with every grace of mind and person. This dainty youth attached himself with a fervent love to the bold and brave John de Courcy; and John, with that depth of tenderness which was part of his strong nature, loved Almeric de Tristram exceedingly. His love for Will de Briwere (as his name now began to be called) had been the protecting love of a strong nature for a weak and dependent one; but the love

between himself and De Tristram was that of two natures that, from their very unlikeness, filled up what was wanting in the other. Almeric was a few years the elder; but John's energetic nature more than made up for the difference in age, whilst his friend's greater experience of life was of much value to him. They were alike in this, that both kept before them the ideal of pure and stainless knighthood, and strove to fashion their own lives accordingly. Their friendship grew with their growth, and to 'love like Almeric de Tristram and John de Courcy,' was the most that could be said for any brothers-in-arms.

De Tristram was of ancient British blood, being descended, it was said, from the good Knight Sir Tristram of Lyonnesse, and one bond between the two youths was the ardent love of both for the legends of old romance. It seemed a wonderful thing to John that his chosen friend should be in truth a descendant of

one of Arthur's knights, and he craved, after the fashion of the times, to give a more open expression to their friendship, and willed that they should unite themselves by a strong religious bond.

On their way to England, therefore, when John was visiting his Castle of Courcy, in Normandy, these two, before the altar of the Church of St. Mary at Rouen, pledged themselves by a solemn vow to die and live together, and to divide faithfully between them the earnings of their valour: and this vow they kept during a long course of service in France and Ireland.

But while John de Courcy was actively engaged in France, William de Briwere was making his way at home. He was constantly employed by King Henry in diplomacy, for which he was chiefly fitted by nature, and his services were repaid by grants of land, chiefly in Somerset; amongst these were the township of Odcombe, the lordship of Brugie Walter,

since corrupted into Bridgewater, and an estate on the little river Ile, which he made his home, and whose name of Ile Brewers still retains his memory.*

John de Courcy had only been able to pay occasional visits to his mother at Stoke during the years in which he was leaving his boyhood behind him, and passing from youth to manhood ; but now, after receiving Knighthood for his gallantry in France, he returned home for a longer stay than usual. This time he brought with him his dear friend and brother-in-arms, Sir Almeric de Tristram, and a joyous welcome they received both from mother and maiden sister. More cordiality was shown to Sir Almeric than had perhaps ever been accorded to Sir William de Briwere, Lady

* The name of Ile Brewers was well known five-and-thirty years ago as the residence of that most eccentric man and great traveller, Dr. Wolff, who was incumbent of the parish. The little river Ile gives its name to three other places, Ilton, Ile Abbot's, and Ilminster. Ilchester, formerly Ivelchester, takes its name from the Yvel.

de Courcy still holding the belief that the profession of arms was far more honourable than any other, besides that she could never forget De Briwere's doubtful parentage.

The greeting between De Courcy and De Briwere was as warm as ever, but it was strange for the former to feel that his old schoolmate and *protégé* was now of far greater importance in the State than he was; in fact, the two had drifted far apart, while he and Sir Almeric were bound together by likeness of pursuits and the choice of maturer years. John could not resist occasionally, with a touch of sarcasm, congratulating De Briwere on his high esteem at Court, but it was the Will of old who answered:

'Ah, John! you forget that your career was marked out for you, your position assured; whereas I, nameless and landless, had to make my own.'

Joyfully did Sir Henry de Louvelle meet his two pupils again together, and thank-

fully had he marked their stainless and honourable careers on the several lines that they had chosen; and he thanked God that by His blessing he had been permitted to witness the fulfilment of the promise he had made.

They resumed many of their old habits, and De Courcy rejoiced in revisiting Castle Cary in the company of both his friends, and inducing Sir Henry de Louvelle to bring forth his treasured manuscripts of lay and legend. While turning them over in these days of happy idlesse, De Courcy chanced upon some ancient prophecies of Merlin, couched in dark and mysterious language, and among them there was one that took a strong hold of his imagination, and which seemed to point plainly to the conquest of Ireland; and as there was much talk in the country at this time whether the King would undertake the subjugation of that land or no, he studied it carefully. It spoke of some strong and valiant knight, of great size and strength, mounted upon a

white horse, with his shield charged with painted birds, who should enter the city of Doune, and capture it. This description took a firm hold of De Courcy, and he brought himself to believe, as he dwelt upon it, that it was he to whom it pointed. But this fancy he kept to himself, and waited to see what events time would bring forth.

But while De Courcy was renewing his old friendship with Sir Henry de Louvelle and De Briwere, exchanging experiences with them, and revisiting his old haunts, Sir Almeric appeared to prefer remaining at Stoke. John only saw in this a characteristic delicacy which made him seek not to interfere with a friendship still older than his own; and he did not notice that Sir Almeric, though willing enough to remain at Stoke, if John were only going to meet De Briwere, or visit Castle Cary, or ride to Glastonbury, yet if Mabel were to be of the party, then Sir Almeric was ever in attendance at her bridle-rein. Nor

did even significant looks from his mother enlighten his mind. Love had never touched his own heart, and he was not quick to perceive its growth in another; if he ever thought about the matter at all, he supposed that as Almeric was *his* brother, he was also Mabel's.

But one day, when De Briwere was engaged in some of his multifarious duties, Sir Almeric and De Courcy were pacing one of the terraces together, when John said:

'I am almost tired of this quiet life. What say you, good brother?'

'Nay; I could never fancy wearying of such a home as yours, De Courcy.'

'I believe I love my home as dearly as any man can, but I would be doing some work in the world; but you, Almeric, you seem to have turned into a squire of dames.'

'Sir, my brother! it is even of this I would fain speak to you. I know what I am going to say is preposterous—I, who

am possessor but of a ruined castle in Cornwall—but I love your sister, the Lady Mabel. Will you and your lady mother grant her to me? If this cannot be, I must leave here at once; but if it might be so, then, John, we should be bound by even a dearer tie than the vow we made at Our Lady's at Rouen.'

'Is this really so, my brother? Then thank God! In the whole wide world I could not have found one to whom I would so willingly have given her.'

'But your mother, John?'

'My mother will think as I do. I know my father's last wishes for his daughters as well as for myself. Nothing on earth could have made me so happy!' And they kissed each other, as brothers used to do. 'I will speak to my mother at once,' said De Courcy.

Sir Almeric still paced the terrace, from whence could be seen one of those thoroughly Somersetshire landscapes, with that purple distance which no painter has

ever yet been able to produce. The green meadows were studded with gold-cups, which shone like stars in this lower firmament, as though the sun with its brilliant photography had transferred the blue sky and silver stars to earth, with a changed and more brilliant hue. Sir Tristram saw the prospect with unheeding eyes. He was revolving in his mind the doubts and uncertainties that every true lover feels. He exaggerated Mabel's charms and his own unworthiness. It was true, John had welcomed him as a brother indeed; but would Lady de Courcy receive him as a son? And Mabel herself?

It was not long he had to wait. De Courcy returned with an impetuous step.

'Here, Almeric!'

He led him into his mother's presence. The stately Lady de Courcy was seated in her chair of ceremony, where she ruled as a princess.

'Mother,' said De Courcy, 'I bring you my dear friend and brother, Sir Almeric

de Tristram, as suitor for my sister's hand.'

'And I,' said Lady de Courcy, 'accept him with all willingness, if my daughter say not nay.'

'Madame,' said Sir Almeric, dropping on one knee and kissing her hand, 'how shall I thank you?'

'I will tell you, sir, when you have won my daughter's love.'

At that moment De Courcy, who was surveying the scene with a face that positively shone with radiant happiness, drew aside a curtain, and there stood Mabel de Courcy, her face and neck all rosy with the blush of maiden love and modesty.

'Nay, Almeric,' said John, laughingly pressing his hand on his shoulder, 'do not rise, man. Mabel shall but take my mother's place, and thou shalt tell thy minstrel tale to her.'

With one hand he led Mabel forward, while with the other he handed Lady de Courcy from her seat.

'And now, mother dear, you and I will go and make love to each other.'

It was difficult to say which of the four were the happiest. John's pet sister to be his Almeric's bride! Almeric to be his very own brother! And for the next hour Lady de Courcy happily listened to the oft-repeated praises of De Tristram, of his prowess in war, of his gentleness, of his faith and his brotherly love; and Sir Almeric's wooing sped happily.

Then De Tristram bade John find a wife, that they both might be married the same day; but De Courcy said there was time enough, and that he had never yet seen anyone he would put in his mother's place. 'And moreover, Almeric,' said he, 'I will never bring a wife to Stoke to displace my mother. Ere I take a bride, I must win a fresh home for myself.'

So, in the lovely summer days, Sir Almeric and the Lady Mabel were married; and as in those days it was not considered necessary to betake themselves for their

honeymoon to some distant scene, they passed a happy time together at Stoke. Then the Lady de Tristram accompanied her husband and brother to Normandy, where her eldest son, Nicholas, was born. Sir Almeric then took his wife and child back to Stoke, and accompanied Sir John de Courcy to Aquitaine, where they were summoned by Prince Richard.

So the years passed on, and seldom were the two friends separated ; and sometimes at Stoke, sometimes in France, they remained as firm friends as before.

CHAPTER V.

ELFRICA.

It was as far back as the year 1155, the year in which our tale began, that Adrian IV., the only Englishman that ever sat on the Papal throne, sent a letter to Henry II., admonishing him to enter Ireland, to reduce it to the Papal obedience, to reform the Church, clearing it from all abuses, and himself to take the lordship of the island.

During the ninth and tenth centuries, when the ravages of the Danes and Northmen desolated England, and tore one of its finest provinces from France, learning and religion alike took refuge in Ireland, so that when a breathing-space occurred

and the ruined monasteries were rebuilt, learned priests and monks were invited from Ireland to fill the restored but now vacant religious houses. As has been before mentioned, St. Dunstan, the most learned man of his time, owed his education entirely to the Irish monks at Glastonbury. But in time the isolation of the Irish Church produced great evils, abuses crept in, and it was now much desired that it should be brought into communion with Western Christendom.

When Henry II. succeeded to the English throne, he was for some years so engrossed with affairs, both in England and France, that his attention was scarcely at all turned to Ireland, and the Pope's letter was disregarded, till the quarrels of the native Princes rose to such a height that the land was full of murder, rapine, and every foul deed. There was neither order nor discipline in Church or State; nay, so great was the savagery that they turned pirates and infested the western

coasts of Britain, much as in former days the Danes had the eastern shores. Women and children were seized and carried captives into Ireland, and there sold as slaves. This, though put a stop to for the time by the preaching of St. Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester, at Bristol, where the hideous traffic was chiefly carried on, and by edicts of the Conqueror, had, in the late troubles, become a cause of complaint once more, and English slaves were commonly to be found in Irish households.

But, in spite of Pope Adrian's admonition, no steps were taken to enter into possession of the country till an Irish King came to England, and, like Count Julian of Spain, to gratify his own personal vengeance, offered, if Henry would grant him help, to hold Ireland as a fief of the English Crown. And so it came to pass that, after much vacillation of the King, and actually at last in spite of his express command, Robert Fitz-Stephen, Constable

of Cardigan, and Richard Clare, surnamed Strongbow, Earl of Pembroke, passed over into Ireland with a small force; and meeting with good success, Strongbow married Eva, the daughter of Dermot McMurrough, King of Leinster, and so bid fair to win the Crown of Ireland for himself. Henry, who could ill bear a rival, growing alarmed at the idea of an independent Norman State so close at his side, went over with a sufficient force, compelled Strongbow to resign his conquests, and received the oath of allegiance from the native Irish Kings and Chieftains.

After this, the renowned Knight, Sir Hugh de Lacy, was appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland; but it was only in the district around Meath that he could really be said to rule—beyond that, lawlessness reigned supreme. And now that Henry was at least nominal sovereign, the Roman Pontiff deputed Vivian, Cardinal of St. Stephen in Mount Cœlius, as Legate to

inquire into the affairs of the Church in Ireland and the adjacent islands. With him the King sent Sir John de Courcy, with a few followers, to act as his guard, and to report to him the state of the country. De Courcy, who took note of everything with the eyes of a soldier and a statesman, soon saw that there was no sufficient force to keep the country in order; and that the Norman Knights and Barons who had settled there, lived like independent princes, scarcely owning any subjection to the Governor, and adding to the general confusion by oppressing the inhabitants.

After passing some time in Ireland, endeavouring to bring the Church into conformity with that of Rome, the Cardinal passed over to the Isle of Mona, where King Godred had professed his willingness to receive the Legate, and assist in reforming the abuses both ecclesiastical and social that prevailed. It would little suit the character of our tale to

recount the deeds of horror and barbarity that form the previous history of Mona. It would but be a record of brother rebelling against brother, of murder and mutilation worse than death, of deeds of which we cannot speak. At this time, Godred, King of Mona, had taken to wife Phingola, daughter of Mac-Lothen, son to Murdoch, so-called King of Ireland. He had seized her, and carried her off by force ; but had treated her with honour, though it was more than doubtful whether they were lawfully united. One great object of the Legate was to promote respect for the holy Sacrament of Matrimony ; and he set himself at once to persuade Godred to unite himself to Phingola according to the rites of the Church, and to set an example to his subjects. To this Godred consented, though Olave, their son, was then three years old. He had, however, three other children by a former union—Reginald, Godred, and a daughter named Elfrica.

It was determined that this marriage should be made an occasion of great ceremony, and that ecclesiastical pomp and secular magnificence should lend dignity to the event, in order to impress the mind of the people, who held the bonds of matrimony far too lightly. The service was performed by Silvanus, Abbot of Rieval, to whom, as a wedding fee, Godred granted land on which to build a monastery; and the Legate was present to do it honour with his Norman guard.

The bride, Phingola, was a beauty of the Keltic type, with soft languishing eyes and dark hair. She wore a tunic of rich tissue over a silken robe, which was gathered in by a belt studded with jewels. As one of her bride-maidens walked her fair step-daughter, the beauteous Lady Elfrica. Godred, the King, and her own mother, were of Scandinavian origin, and Elfrica inherited the exquisite purity of complexion which is the type of that race. With the fairness of the lily itself, she had

the delicate rose-tint that one sees only in an Eastern shell. Her golden hair hung as a veil to her waist; her crown was of natural flowers; her eyes shone like violets glistening in the morning dew, and with the same modest and retiring grace. Her dress was a tunic of white muslin over a robe of pale green silk, and her belt was studded with native pearls; and this dress shrouded, but did not conceal, the perfect grace of her figure.

John de Courcy, in his place in attendance on the Legate, was arrayed in as splendid a costume as he had at hand, and was himself a magnificent figure. As the procession swept on, his eyes, attracted by the bevy of attendant damsels, rested at once on the fair vision of the daughter bride-maiden; her loveliness was the more enhanced by the contrast she offered to the dark beauty of the bride-wife.

And as he gazed at her, he, who had scarce ever before even thought of woman's love, felt his heart go from him with a

bound, and he had eyes for naught but her. When the marriage ceremony was over, and the procession left the Cathedral, each of the maidens was led by a knight or chief of high rank; and to De Courcy, as the stranger of highest birth, was allotted the fair being who had so won his regard.

He bowed low as he was desired to lead her out, but he scarce dared touch the fairy fingers that rested upon his; so slight they seemed, so dainty, he feared to crush them. Was she a vision, and would she pass away? He felt so strong, so big, so clumsy; he longed to be something different. He would fain have been slighter, fairer! At the wedding feast his seat was next to hers, and he strove to conquer the unwonted bashfulness that made him dumb, and find words in which to address her.

At last he took courage to ask her had she been in England or Ireland?

'In neither,' she answered. 'My own mother came from Norway, and my father,

following her wishes, sent me to be trained there, in the nunnery founded by Bishop Grimkele, at Drontheim.'

She spoke as if De Courcy, being an Englishman, must needs know who Bishop Grimkele was. De Courcy was obliged to confess his ignorance.

'Yet he was an Englishman, Sir Knight. King Ethelred, at St. Olave's prayer, sent him with a band of priests to teach my mother's people the way of truth, and my mother was descended from St. Magnus, St. Olave's son.'

'Ah, Lady,' he said, 'that was before we Normans came to England; but I take shame to myself that I have learned so little of those times. But I mind me now that by London Bridge are churches called by the names of St. Olave and St. Magnus. When I see them again, I will honour them as your ancestors.'

'Nay, nay, my Lord; honour them as saints.'

She asked eager questions concerning

England, and he found himself telling her of his own beloved home in Somerset.

'You speak as if you loved your home dearly. Do you go back there?'

'Lady, it was my father's home, and my mother now lives there; but I go shortly on an expedition to Ireland, where, if God wills, I may win me lands and fame.'

'And will you stay there?'

'I know not; it must be as Heaven pleases; but, before I settle there, I trust to find myself here again.'

'Here! You? At our poor little island?'

'I trust so,' he said; but again bashfulness seized on them both, and he could not trust himself to say more.

The Legate made a stay of some weeks at Mona, settling ecclesiastical discipline and cleansing the Church from superstitious and semi-heathen observances, counselling the Bishops, persuading the King to obey the Church's rule, and everywhere re-ordaining those clergy whose orders did

not seem valid, and marrying all those, gentle and simple, whose marriage bond was not free from doubt.

Meanwhile Sir John de Courcy found his heart more and more given to the fair Elfrica. At first it was hard to realize to himself that he, who had been in half the Courts of Europe, who had seen most of the celebrated beauties of high birth and great estate, and had never before met with one to stir his heart, should have suddenly yielded his whole strong being, his passionate nature, to this fair Northern flower, whom he found blooming in an obscure island, and only betraying its fragrant beauty to one who sought it.

True love is ever diffident, and scarcely could John de Courcy believe that the delicate colour which suffused Elfrica's cheek when he approached was for him alone, and that, though sweet and gracious to all, for him was reserved the shy welcome that lighted up every feature with a new and before unfelt happiness. But time was

speeding, and in a few days the Legate was to return to Ireland and De Courcy to England. He determined, therefore, to put his fate to the touch at once.

He sought her and found her on the terrace of the strong Castle of Peel, which looked towards the Irish coast. She welcomed him with a blush and a smile, of which none but a true lover could have doubted the significance. He followed the direction of her eyes, and said :

'When the Lady Elfrica turns her gaze upon the Western Isle, will she deign to think of, and sometimes offer a prayer for, the Knight who is, and ever will be, devoted to her service ?'

Elfrica evaded a direct answer by saying :

' I thought, my Lord, you were about to sail for England, instead of returning to Ireland with the Legate.'

' It is true, Lady ; but that is but to make my report to King Henry, and to gather a sufficient force. I am bound then to return

to Ireland, to complete the subjugation of that country to the English Crown, according to the desire of the Holy Father and his grants to my King. But, when I leave Mona, all places will be alike to me. Never before have I felt the bitterness of parting!'

'Ah! Sir Knight, it is women alone who know what parting is in all its bitterness. We stay at home, and wait—and wait; while men, they go away, and—forget.'

A crimson flush flooded her cheeks and temples, and, as she covered her face with her hand to conceal her emotion, De Courcy could see the rosy colour on her delicate neck, while through her slender fingers streamed the tears.

'Forget, lady! Can I ever forget? Only bid me hope, only believe that wherever John de Courcy is, your image alone will be graven on his heart; only tell me you *will* wait, and, please God, when I have won me an assured position in

Ireland, I will return and claim you as my own.'

'Will you, indeed, my Lord, remember the poor Princess of Mona's Isle?'

He pressed the hand he held to his lips. She turned, but her face was veiled by her golden hair. His arm was round her.

'Look up, my sweet one!—my lady! my love!'

One shy glance, and he clasped her in his strong arms, and pressed a passionate kiss upon her lips.

'Forgive me, Elfrica. But now I may ask your father's sanction, and, please God, you shall be my betrothed before I go.'

'Yes,' she said.

That very evening the Lord de Courcy sought the King, and, with the manly grace that belonged to him, he asked of Godred the promise of his daughter's hand. He said, and the Legate vouched for his truth, that he had lands enow in France and England, but that he was bound to King Henry to join the force preparing to

subdue Ireland; and that when he had won him fame and honour there, and brought the country into subjection, he would there probably reside, so that Elfrica would not be far separated from her early home.

Godred was indeed delighted to give his daughter to a valiant Baron of England and Normandy, and would have let him take her with him then and there; but De Courcy had vowed never to give Stoke another mistress while his mother lived; and, moreover, it seemed to him more honourable to fulfil his pledge to the King, and when he had in some sort settled Ulster, whither he was bound, then, when he had prepared her a home, to come back and fetch his bride.

The next day they were betrothed in the Chapel; they exchanged rings and pledged their faith to each other; and there, where they had confessed their love, they bade each other adieu. From the terrace the Princess of Mona watched her

knight's departure; and as he stood on the deck, his eyes ever turned to the spot where he could see her form, and she waved her kerchief when it was not used to wipe away the blinding tears.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONQUEST OF ULSTER AND RETURN TO MONA.

It was in the year 1177 that King Henry appointed William Fitz-Aldelm Deputy-Governor of Ireland, and John de Courcy, with a gallant troop of his own raising, amongst whom was his brother-in-law, Sir Almeric de Tristram, joined his forces. But Fitz-Aldelm soon made himself heartily unpopular, and great indignation arose amongst the other knights and nobles at his arbitrary exactions, his unwarrantable usurpations, and the generally selfish and grasping course of his policy. Such conduct alienated the greater part of the English and Irish, and was abhorrent to John de Courcy's whole nature. Finding

that his feelings were shared by so many, he gathered the discontented knights together and set out for Ulster, for the subjugation of which province he held a special commission from the King. When Henry was in Ireland, the chiefs of Ulster and Connaught alone evaded doing him homage, and it was necessary now, if the island was to be subject to the English Crown, to make them yield personal submission or to conquer them.

The first point reached by the fleet was Howth, and here, De Courcy being ill, Sir Almeric de Tristram took the command. A pitched battle was fought with the Irish at the bridge of Ivora, and so valiantly did Sir Almeric bear himself, that by general consent the Barony of Howth was allotted to him.

The little army now set out for Ulster with De Courcy at their head. He had never forgotten Merlin's prophecy, which had so struck his imagination, and he determined to make trial of its truth. He com-

manded, therefore, his shield to be charged with devices of painted birds, clad himself in his brightest armour; then, mounted upon his favourite charger, Somerset, which was white without a single coloured hair, he made a shining figure at the head of his force. After four days' march they reached Doune, where, being wholly unexpected, it was only the sounding of bugles, the clashing of armour, and the tramp of heavy cavalry that announced the arrival of these formidable strangers.

But here an opposition upon which he had not calculated met him. As he approached the city, he was met, like Coriolanus of old, by a train of all that was worthy and reverend, headed by his old friend the Legate, Cardinal Vivian. Partly depending upon De Courcy's friendship, but still more upon the authority of the Church, the Cardinal came out to oppose him. He affirmed that inasmuch as the chiefs of Ulster had yielded obedience to the Church, it was only necessary for

them to pay tribute, and that they ought not to have an English Governor imposed upon them. De Courcy listened courteously, even respectfully, but he firmly believed in his appointed mission. He represented that no obedience had been rendered to the civil power, that if the people would receive him as the King's representative he would be their good lord. He showed his patent and commission from the King, who on his part acted with the direct authority of the Pope. He professed his obedience to the Church, but said that nothing short of a supernatural warning would turn him from his purpose.

The Cardinal then retired, bidding him beware, and that he must now take the consequences of his perversity. Then Sir John de Courcy entered Doune, and fortified the city.

But now was seen what unscrupulous measures the Legate would take to gain his ends. His object was to bind the

Irish Church to that of Rome by favours received, which would have resulted in making Ireland simply a fief of the Papal see, as in later years John held England. He stirred up the Irish to resistance, and Roderick, one of the native Kings, sent a force against the English amounting to ten thousand men, whereas De Courcy's troop numbered at the most seven hundred. But then the English were all picked men, veterans in war, and led by knights of approved valour, while the greater part of the Irish were wretched kernes, dragged to the battle by their chiefs, and, moreover, though valiant, they were ill-armed, and utterly deficient in discipline. With these fearful odds in point of numbers a battle was fought: De Courcy, like a brave captain, was ever to be seen where the fight was hottest, and was ably seconded by Sir Almeric, who performed prodigies of valour. The Irish were defeated, and the county of Doune subdued.

It would be tedious to follow this brave

band in all their valiant deeds, and it must suffice to say that step by step and inch by inch they reduced the whole north of Ireland. But the battle of Lurgan cannot be passed over. The scene of this fight was a river of the same name on the borders of Doune and Armagh, and the story of the fight runs thus: After a great battle, in which the Irish were defeated, Sir Almeric, who was in command of the horse, pursued the fugitives, while Sir John with the infantry followed close upon the retreat of six hundred of the enemy, who were retiring, disordered and sore be-sted. As they were hurrying from the pursuit, they came upon an arm of the sea, which at the spring tides rose high, and which they found it impossible to cross. Then, gathering courage from despair, they faced round and fronted their foes, and lo! they saw Sir John de Courcy with his page, Nicholas de Tristram (his nephew) far in advance of the rest, for the soldiers, the moment they saw the Irish turn,

halted, and as the enemy advanced they in their turn retreated, nothing doubting, so they said, that Sir John was following. They might have known him better!

Seeing the danger he was in of being surrounded, he said to his nephew, who still kept by his side:

'My boy, you cannot aid me. Stay with those foot-soldiers if you cannot persuade them to return.'

'Nay, my uncle; and what would my father say to me, if, to save my life, I lost my honour?'

'Listen, boy,' said his uncle. 'Your first duty as a good soldier is obedience. Leave me, I command you. Hasten to your father, and tell him I am in need of help. God keep thee, my brave lad!' he added, as Nicholas knelt for his blessing, and then, speeding away with all haste, overtook the retreating company.

'Cowards! knaves that ye are!' said he. 'See you not that Sir John de Courcy is being surrounded? Look there, if ye

be men!' and he turned and pointed with his sword to his uncle, who was now being hemmed in, but from his great height and shining armour was a conspicuous object, as he lay about him valiantly, 'swashing and lashing on all sides like a lion amongst sheep.'

'Well, young sir,' said the foremost man-at-arms, 'it seems to me that your dainty pageship is turning *your* back also on the foe. We fully thought that you and Sir John were retreating; and at least *we* have not fled.'

'Traitors!' said the brave boy, choked with sobs, 'my uncle *commanded* me to go. I do but waste time and breath. I am speeding to my father for help.'

Then he fled on, as if indeed he were being pursued. The men looked foolishly on one another, and he who was apparently their leader said:

'Let us turn aside, and wait till Sir Tristram comes up, and then join in with his forces.'

'Meanwhile,' said some dozen of the men of Somerset, 'we will not wait to see our captain killed before our very eyes, and lend no hand to aid him;' and they rushed on to join Sir John.

The others still hesitated, but the brave boy—he was but twelve years old—held on his way. Suddenly he bethought him of the horses picketed near at hand. He rushed to the spot, where they stood bridled and saddled, seized the one esteemed the fleetest, and rode for dear life—not his own, but his uncle's. Joy! he met his father's troop nearer than he had dared to hope, for Sir Tristram had stayed the pursuit and was hastening to his brother's aid. His eye was the first to discover the small figure riding at headlong speed. He sprang to his feet, and hastened to meet him.

'Nicholas, my boy, what news?'

'Alas, my father!' he gasped, 'mine uncle, Sir John, is left alone in the midst of his enemies; his soldiers have forsaken him.'

Then said Sir Almeric :

'Here, my son, take charge of my troop. Young as you are, they will follow their captain's son. I will rally the foot; it cannot be that they are cowards and traitors !'

There were those amongst Sir Almeric's troop who followed his example, and, killing their horses that they might not fall into the hands of the enemy, pursued his swift steps till they came up with the main body.

'My men,' he said, 'we must hasten to our leader, who is in danger. Come on, fellow-soldiers, to rescue my brother, and live or die with him.'

At sight of him and the sound of his brave cheery words, the soldiers took heart. He gave the onset and dashed into the *mêlée,* where Sir John's blows were falling slower and with a less certain aim. Sir Almeric thought but of his brother, and made his way to him, while his followers fell on the Irish. Those that could,

fled; and the rest either fell beneath their swords, or yielded on condition of quarter.

It was over in less time than it takes to tell; and Sir John, though sore wounded and breathless with his cruel fight, was so overjoyed to see Sir Almeric, that he recked little of the plight he was in, and, but for his entreaties, would scarce have attended to his wounds.

'Is the boy safe? and hast thou seen him, my brother?'

'Ay,' answered De Tristram; 'it was he who brought us news of the strait you were in.'

'You may be proud of the lad, Almeric. He would fain have stayed to share my dangers; and it was but to make him leave me that I sent him to you; for I thought not that you could have reached me in time.'

Sir Almeric's face glowed with pleasure at the praise of his first-born; but not even to listen to the commendation, so rarely given and so justly earned, would he delay

seeing to the hurts that Sir John had received.

And now the Irish began to appreciate the fact that, however they might occasionally get the better for a moment, yet in the end they were sure to be worsted in a conflict, and that a ready submission and loyal obedience ensured good treatment; they found that these Norman knights, who could fight so bravely, would also show mercy when opposition was over, and they themselves, or at least the best of them, were getting tired of the anarchy which had so long prevailed. De Courcy and Sir Almeric toiled unceasingly to secure such tranquillity as should justify their fetching home, the one his bride, the other his wife. Sir Hugh de Lacy had now returned to Meath, and the leaders held a consultation as to their plans. It was agreed, with the sanction of the Grand Justiciary, that, as De Tristram had lately been at Stoke, and they could not be spared together, Sir John should, after

paying a visit to England to complete his preparations, go to Mona, to celebrate his marriage, and bring home from thence his island Princess; after which, in his turn, Sir Almeric should go to Stoke and bring back his wife and family.

And now Sir John pressed forward eagerly the arrangements at Doune Castle, which he proposed making his principal residence. Having lived for so many years in the South of France, the land of chivalry and romance, he was accustomed to the elegancies of life, such as Norman or Saxon had little knowledge of in those days. Many were the orders given that he might provide a bower befitting his bride. It was quaint to see the great warrior, with a puzzled face, giving directions which he himself scarce understood how to carry out. With the help of a lay-brother from one of the convents, he even strove to lay out a parterre for his garden. Joyfully did he toil, earnestly did he work, for he would not have his fair

one till he had secured some degree of order and refinement. There was one thing above all must be done, lest a curse should light upon their union instead of a blessing. In one of his battles he had unwittingly destroyed the Abbey of Erynagl, in Lecule, county Down; and till at least he had begun to make compensation for this sacrilege, unavoidable though it was, he was afraid of any evil befalling his union. So he marked out the ground for the Abbey of Inis-Courcy, and transferred large lands to the Church for endowment; and then, his conscience at ease, he appointed Sir Almeric as Captain of his forces and Governor of Doune in his absence, and, accompanied by his nephew as his page and his faithful squire William de Bracton, set sail for Somerset.

At Bristol he landed; and sending on his nephew to Stoke, delayed himself to give orders to the merchants for suits of gold and silver damask, and crimson and blue cloth hose, that he might make a

brave appearance at his wedding. Then, as presents for his bride, he ordered robes of silver tissue, with jewelled belts and rare diadems for her hair; and he smiled at himself at his magnificent preparations. But nothing was too rich and rare for Elfrica. After his orders were given, he hastened to Stoke, and found his mother and the Lady de Tristram, with her little sons John and Arthur, well. He delighted the young mother's heart with the tale of her boy's heroism, and told her that it was to him he owed his life.

'And to Almeric?' she said.

'To Almeric, sister, I have owed my life again and again; but I wish you to know that your son is worthy of his father;' and Sir John laid his hand on the boy's head, whose blushes were hidden in his mother's arms.

A hurried visit to London for stores of rich plate, both for ecclesiastical service and his own use, was made; and there he found the Court, and gave account of

his work and its progress. Another to Glastonbury, where he purchased service-books, magnificently bound in gold and silver, adorned with precious stones; for Glastonbury still preserved the tradition of its exquisite metal-work, which it inherited from St. Dunstan, who to the present day remains the patron of the Goldsmiths' Company.

Lady de Courcy looked out from her own jewels wedding-gifts for her daughter-in-law, with stores of fine linen, the work of her maidens, and a suite of tapestry for Elfrica's bower; and so laden, with costly treasures and gifts, the happy bridegroom prepared for his return, promising his sister her Almeric's speedy arrival to bring her to their new home. His mother sighed, nor can we blame her; it was the first time that her John had left her without reluctance—it was the first time he had left Stoke without fond lingerings and promises of speedy return. But Lady de Courcy fought bravely against the too

natural feeling, and sent her love and blessing to Elfrica. 'Be to her as true as your father was to me, and may your Elfrica know better how to appreciate my son than I did my lord.'

And now De Courcy set sail from Bristol, not again to stay his course till he reached Mona. The vessel bounded over the waves as if to keep time with his impatience. Two years had passed, and he had scarce heard tidings of her, yet he *knew* that she loved him still. Through a Bristol trader, which bore some of the purchases prepared to deck his home, he had sent word of his coming; but communication was then so uncertain, that he could not feel sure he was expected; but he said to himself that, even if they were not prepared, he would have no delay. He wanted Elfrica, and Ireland wanted him; and so he vowed not to wait, but to have the wedding at once. So the impatient bridegroom said to himself, as he paced the deck, and his followers amused

themselves at their great leader's eagerness.

But at last the faint blue cloud-like outline came in sight, and as it became more and more defined, Snaefell could be made out. As they neared the shore a boat was sent off from Castle Rushin, bidding them round the shore and make for Peel Castle. And so where he bade her adieu he was to meet her again. As they approached near enough to discern objects clearly, he looked. Was it a lover's excited fancy? or was there really a figure on the terrace, watching and waving his welcome? What recked he of unloading his vessel or aught else? He bounded up the narrow and steep steps—up, up, nearly a perpendicular ascent; and as he sprang upon the ledge and appeared suddenly before her, a faint scream showed her happy surprise. In a moment she was clasped in his arms.

'My beautiful one, how weary a time it has seemed! But how did you know I was at hand?'

'How? By watching every day since you left me for your return. I knew you would come, for you said so; and oh, I have so prayed for it!'

The lovers talked on. They forgot the flight of time, till at last murmurs were heard and a rushing to and fro, and then the Lady Elfrica was summoned by name, and her nurse Elftrude came, and half scolding her young lady, would know where they had hidden themselves. And the Lord de Courcy said:

'Ah, nurse, you forget that love has wings. I could not wait for ceremony when I saw my lady waving her tiny banner to me.'

'Ah, well-a-day!' she said. 'What will not love do?'

Now sounds of a company were heard, and out on the terrace came Godred and Phingola, followed by a host of attendants, whilst De Courcy's own followers were mingled with them; and after greeting between the elders, De Courcy introduced

his followers to his bride, and above all the bright boy, his nephew Nicholas, who dropped on one knee and kissed her hand.

De Courcy found that his message had arrived, and that preparations for the wedding were in a state of forwardness. And so, after a day or two, in which he only learned to love more the bright being that was so soon to be his, the day arrived which was to make her his own for ever.

Brought up as she had been in distant Norway, she seemed to have passed through life gathering only its sweetest blossoms, and not even seeing the impure, the poisonous, the false, the cruel, and the base. And she—she honoured him as something brighter, purer, higher, wiser than aught she had met before—so upright he was, so noble, so God-fearing. He taught her not to expect peace and ease. She was to teach these wild Irish by her example, she was to show the ladies of her court how to be modest and obedient; and, when she trembled at the thought of what

he expected from her, he reminded her that each day brings strength sufficient for its duties.

The day had come which was to give him his heart's best treasure, and stalwart John proceeded to adorn himself with a care which certainly he had never before taken, in order that he might appear as a bridegroom in some sort worthy of his bride. He was arrayed in a tunic of cloth of silver, with a belt and cap to match Elfrica's eyes, his hose of the same colour. His magnificent proportions and fine figure were shown to great advantage by his dress, and he looked a bridegroom worthy even of the fair being who stood by his side at the altar.

The Lady Elfrica was arrayed in a robe of silver tissue, glistening all over as the hoar-frost when the early sun turns it to diamonds, before it has risen high enough to dissolve its beauty. Her hair was confined by a snood adorned with hanging brilliants, which yet shone with scarcely

more radiancy than the golden hair which hung around her. She looked a vision of beauty, and De Courcy, unconscious of his own splendid appearance, could scarcely believe that this fairy-like being was indeed now to be his own. Then the holy words were said, and the troth was plighted, and the sacred feast was held.

After this came the inevitable banquet. I fear it was prolonged beyond the bounds of prudence or sobriety; but how proud did Elfrica feel that her own dear Lord, though behaving with all courteous friendliness, and showing no stern asceticism, yet never allowed himself to exceed the bounds of decorum, whilst so many of her own people succumbed to the influence of the good cheer.

The next day they were to sail for Doune. Sir John de Courcy's vessel was gaily decked; others had come over from Ireland, and they were attended by a fleet from Mona. And now the parting had

come. Godred, her father, embraced and blessed her; her step-mother Phingola wept over her, and scarce knew how to let her go; her brothers Reginald and Godred promised to visit her at Doune; while little Olave, her step-mother's son, and her own special darling, wept at losing her.

For a moment they stood on the terrace where De Courcy had told his love, where they had parted and met again, and the silent clasp of their hands showed how they shared each the other's feelings, and that now they knew that not even death itself could part them. Here they stood together to view the preparations for their departure. When all was in readiness, her father led her down, while De Courcy handed Phingola. All was ready, and, leaning on her husband's arm, she stepped on board the vessel which was to bear her to her new home. Tears started to her eyes.

'Do you repent, Elfrica?'

'Repent! and with thee!'

The vessel danced on the waves, and the Earl of Ulster and his bride were on their way to Ireland.

CHAPTER VII.

ELFRICA IN IRELAND.

With all due honour and state were Sir John de Courcy and his bride received at Doune. Watch had been kept on the Mourne Mountains, and a beacon was lighted on Slieve Donard as soon as the vessel came in sight with his banner flying in the breeze. A pilot-boat led the way to guide the larger vessel through the intricate passage which leads from the Irish Sea to Strangford Lough; then it turned southwards to Doune Patrick, where the river Quoile finds its reedy way through a plain which lies at the foot of Doune, and empties itself into the lake. De Courcy pointed out the several objects of interest.

'How often,' she said, 'have I looked out for Slieve Donard when the sky was clear enough to see it, and now I am in its shadow.'

'And there is Doune,' said her husband. 'And yonder is our Castle.'

'Our home,' she said.

'And that is St. Patrick's Cathedral, though some say it dates from a period earlier than St. Patrick himself. It stands much in need of repairs, and we will superintend its restoration together.'

As they neared the pier they could distinguish a concourse consisting of knights and nobles, priests and monks, and a little apart from the crowd, ladies on palfreys, with their attendants.

Waving his cap with one hand to acknowledge their glad reception, with the other De Courcy led forth Elfrica, and in dumb show presented her to his friends, who greeted them both with loud huzzas. Then, as the vessel touched the landing-place, he leaped on shore, and at once

lifted out his bride. De Courcy presented her to the different groups, but first of all, and above all, did he single out his beloved brother, Sir Almeric de Tristram.

'Of whom you have heard much,' said the proud husband.

'Indeed I have,' she answered, 'and much do I hope soon to know my dear lord's sister, and your wife, sir.'

'And your sister also, madame.'

She thanked him with a look, but had to give her attention to other introductions, and to receive welcomes on all sides. It was a trying ordeal, but the fair Princess of Mona went through it with modest courtesy, and infinite grace and sweetness.

A snow-white palfrey, with sea-green trappings, was awaiting her. She was an accomplished horsewoman, and, accompanied by her husband, rode fleetly over the plain, while the Cathedral bells rang out, and banners waved, and the people shouted their welcome, and blessed her bonnie face.

'Shall we go, my wife, to the Cathedral, and give thanks for our safe arrival?'

'Indeed we will,' she responded.

It was a gloomy old building, much out of repair, but the gay company gave life and brightness to it; and a 'Te Deum' was sung, and the 'Angelus' followed, and then, mounting their horses again, they soon reached the Castle. After presenting her to his household, De Courcy himself led her up the turret stairs, to the apartments reserved for her use. Here was her own bower, specially prepared for her by her husband's loving care. The walls were hung with tapestry, representing the meeting of Isaac and Rebecca.

'Would you have come,' he said, 'if I had sent a messenger, instead of fetching you myself?'

'Yes,' she said; 'but it is better—far better as it is.'

A couch, a few chairs, and an Irish harp were almost the whole furniture. To a modern beauty it would have looked bare

and unfurnished, but in her eyes it seemed perfect.

'Then rest here awhile,' he said, 'till the evening meal is ready. Norna shall wait upon you.'

'And must you go?'

'Ah, child! you forget that I shall no longer have time for all the dalliance that has been so sweet.'

'I know it,' she answered, 'and, please God, I will never be a hindrance to you.'

She looked up brightly, and he embraced her fondly; but she felt wearied, and a sadness and sinking of heart stole over her, and, lying on her couch, she dreaded the thought of the evening feast. But her husband had not forgotten her. Norna brought her in some spiced wine, and cakes, and, after the refreshment and a short rest, her buoyant spirits rose again.

Meanwhile, De Courcy was receiving the compliments so grateful to the ears of a young husband on the bride of his choice. Her exquisite grace, her beauty, her

courtesy, were the theme of every lip. Sir Almeric clasped his hand, and said:

'How Mabel will love her!'

'Ah! you must go and fetch our Mabel home. My pretty one thinks much of seeing her, and learning from her the ways of a Norman dame.'

I know how Mabel will delight in her, but I believe her own tact and grace will be sufficient guide.'

'Well! Mabel wants you, and I shall want you back again; so, as soon as our wedding festivities are over, I shall speed you off to Stoke.'

It is doubtful how much business was done, to hear the praises of his darling was so sweet. But it suddenly struck him that business had been his excuse for leaving her; so he began to question concerning castles and forts, the progress of works, the general condition of the country, and the behaviour of the Irish, etc. Having satisfied himself that things were going on well, he proceeded to

array himself for the early supper. Going to Elfrica's bower, he found her rested and prepared; and adorned so as to charm his eye, and gratify his pride in her. He led her in, arrayed in robes of pale green silk, her golden hair adorned with precious gems, and she might have passed for a naiad or a sea nymph fresh from the caves of her island home. Their table was raised on a daïs, to which were admitted only knights and dames of high degree; and in the central place, facing the middle of the long hall, were their seats prepared. The Lady Elfrica sat at her husband's left hand, and on her other side was Sir Almeric de Tristram, Sir John Savage and his lady being on De Courcy's right, the other guests at the upper table being placed according to their degree, while the remainder of the household sat at tables running the length of the hall.

While De Courcy was conversing with Sir John Savage, and other captains and knights, of the affairs that had taken place

in his absence, Sir Almeric and the Lady de Courcy spoke together on a theme of which neither could ever tire. Sir Tristram's enthusiasm for his friend and brother satisfied even De Courcy's wife: and he told her tale upon tale of his bravery in war —his courtesy to his captives—his gentleness to women—his loyal love to his master, Prince Richard; and, above all, of his tried and steadfast friendship to himself. Happy tears glistened in Elfrica's eyes as she said:

'It is good of you to tell me all this. I should never learn it from him, for it is little indeed that he ever says of his own deeds. One knew it must be so, but to hear it from you—who have known him so long and so well—gives it a double value.'

'Yes,' he said, 'and one day you may hear the same character of him in his boyish days from one who knew him well ere I did.'

'His mother?'

'Nay, I did not mean either his mother

or sister, but his earliest friend, Sir William de Briwere. He will tell you of his prowess amongst his fellows as a lad, of his protection of the weak, and his detestation of all that was mean or false.'

It was very precious to Elfrica to hear the praises of her husband, but gradually the conversation drifted into talk of his home, of his mother, and his sister; and she told Sir Almeric how she looked forward to the coming of the Lady de Tristram—'My Mabel,' as he called her—how she looked to her to instruct her in the etiquette of a Norman court, and to assist her in her duties and labours.

'Mabel will be only too glad to be a sister to you, madame; but it may be that her home will not be here.'

'Not in Ireland?' she said, in dismay.

'Oh yes, in Ireland, please God; but it may not be *here*. Our policy is to scatter the knights in castles at some little distance from each other, and so make centres for good government and civilization.'

'Ah, I shall hope that you may be settled here! Sir John has had so little home-life, he tells me, and I do so wish to make a happy home for him.'

'Madame, you need not fear. You are his home, and you may trust, with a faith little short of religion, that he will (to use the homely English word) be the true house-band.'*

It was a lively meal, with plenty of sober mirth, but all was decorously, even elegantly arranged. De Courcy's long residence abroad had made him accustomed to a degree of refinement to which neither the Court of Henry of Anjou nor of Godred of Man could have made any pretension, and he preferred the light wines of the south of France to the heavy drinks in which English and Scandinavians alike indulged.

Supper over, Compline said in the chapel, the night watch set, and the word

* 'The name of the husband, what is it to say?
Of wife and of household the band and the stay.'
TUSSEN: *Points of Husbandry.*

given to the guard—'Elfrica'—all retired to rest, and the Princess of Mona's life at Doune had begun.

It was never dull, though often it might be for days—when De Courcy had to be absent on military or State affairs—she was separated from him. He ever remained her lover, and each return, however short the absence, was noted by her as a festival. She ruled well her household, and knew how to practise the exquisite arts of design and embroidery which still remain a wonder to our age. Orders had been given for the restoration of Doune Cathedral, and she pleased herself with embroidering costly hangings with which to adorn it. Meanwhile, peace and good order prevailed, for, with two such wise statesmen and brave commanders as Hugh de Lacy and John de Courcy, the land was quiet and the people submissive.

Christmas was at hand. Sir Almeric de Tristram was to spend his at Stoke with his wife and Lady de Courcy, and in the

spring to return with his family, and settle at Howth; whilst Sir John and his bride had a pressing invitation from Sir Hugh de Lacy to spend their Christmas at Meath, and assist him at the festivities, which were planned principally with the view of gratifying the native chiefs.

The Justiciary was a rugged warrior, past middle age, and squarely built. His face was open and truthful, but had withal an air of weariness and anxiety. His wife, a daughter of Roderic O'Connor, King of Connaught, had by her beauty and wild grief at her father's death, touched the feelings of this true-hearted gentleman. He had taken charge of her, and would have treated her as a daughter, but soon found that the only refuge for her must be a convent unless he made her his wife. She was only half educated, and wholly untamed; and his Una, though faithfully attached to him, was more of a care and a trouble than a comfort to the old man. She was a thorough Celt, and, with the

playfulness of a kitten, had something of the undeveloped tigress in her nature. Their family consisted only of two sons, Walter and Hugh, the children of De Lacy's old age, who were much indulged, perhaps spoiled by him; by their mother they were treated with a half-savage affection, alternating with bursts of passion when they opposed her will.

The old and the young warrior had much to say to each other. De Courcy was glad of hints from the wider experience of Sir Hugh, and, in fact, from his position as Justiciary or Lord Deputy, De Lacy exercised a certain amount of control over the younger Knight. He explained to De Courcy his method of dealing with the native Irish, and also of avoiding opportunities of collision between them and the Norman soldiers and colonists. If it appeared to De Courcy that his system savoured of letting no one injure the native race but himself, he kept his ideas in his own breast, but he listened eagerly, and

carefully stored up the information he received.

But it was plain that De Lacy had something special on his mind that he wished to say, and one day, as together they were pacing the court of the Castle, noting first carefully that no one was within earshot, he made the request, with a certain hesitation and diffidence that greatly touched De Courcy, that he would receive his eldest son Hugh into his household as page, and train him in the duties of chivalry at Doune.

'No, my Lord,' said De Courcy, in his direct and truthful way, 'I grieve much to refuse a request of yours, and one the very nature of which implies a compliment that is no small honour to a young man like myself, but your boy requires an older hand than mine.'

De Lacy interrupted him to express how perfect his confidenee was in him, and how renowned a warrior he was considered.

'I thank you, my Lord, for your good

opinion, and believe me that I feel it deeply; but the discipline your son requires would come ill from a man no older than myself. Moreover, it were better to remove him——' he hesitated.

'From his mother's influence,' said De Lacy, sighing. 'I know it, but——' He thought awhile, and then said, as if to himself: 'Would Damian and Evelyn take charge of the lad? They owe me somewhat, and Chester is near at hand.' Then, addressing De Courcy: 'Thanks, young sir, for your truthful outspeaking.'

De Courcy almost blushed.

'I ask your pardon, my Lord, for speaking so bluntly; but for all my French training, I have never learned that any way is better than the shortest and most direct. And believe me, my Lord, you may command me in anything that I can do for yourself; or, in time to come, if there be aught in which I may be of service to your wife and children, gladly and thankfully will I do it.'

'I am sure of it, De Courcy; and in this wild country, Heaven only knows how soon your promise may be claimed!'

Meanwhile, during the time that their husbands conferred on affairs of State, and subjects both social and personal, the ladies passed much of their time together; but their acquaintance did not progress so happily and satisfactorily. The sweet shy grace of the Lady Elfrica was shocked by the careless, almost bold talk of the Lady de Lacy. Lady Una could be dignified at times; but there was an assumption in her manner that offended the Norman ladies, whilst to those of Saxon blood her behaviour was simply insulting. And with all this, she failed to conciliate her own people, who considered that she had betrayed her country by allying herself with the invaders. Still more was Elfrica shocked at the behaviour of the sons to their mother when out of their father's sight.

High festival was kept at Christmas;

and in the great hall of Meath Castle, Norman nobles and Irish chiefs, ladies of high degree from Anjou, Normandy, and Guienne, as well as from English castles, were there, mingled with native chieftains and Irish beauties with unpronounceable names. Saxons were there also, some in positions of trust, and others of both sexes, alas! in the trains of the chiefs and their ladies, as slaves. Privately, De Courcy expressed his surprise and indignation at this, when the export of slaves was forbidden by the English law. De Lacy owned this, but explained that at present it was absolutely impossible to put a stop to the traffic, as trustworthy servants were unattainable; 'though,' he said, 'as nurses and foster-mothers their devotion is entire.'

The feasting and general entertainments went off prosperously: no riotous drinking was allowed; good order was kept, and the Irish grace and courtesy, when under due restraint, mingled with the quaint

conceits and humour which has always distinguished them, enlivened the conversation, and caused much mirth among their hosts.

After the tables were drawn, dancing began, and old Sir Hugh excused himself, and presented Sir William Fitz-Stephen, his second in command, to Lady Elfrica, as his substitute, while De Courcy led out the Lady de Lacy; but the haughty dame managed to make the dance as disagreeable as possible to her partner, though of course, like every Irishwoman, she danced with perfect grace. She resented the change in plans with regard to her son's destination, and attributed it, with characteristic intuition, to De Courcy's influence.

Elfrica's dance was far more successful, and De Courcy was besieged by requests for an introduction to his wife; and it was with a loving pride he noticed how, without effort, she won all hearts. At last he saw her looking wistfully at him; he was at once by her side.

'What is it, Elfrica? Has the dancing tired thee, sweet one?'

'No, dear my Lord! but there is a gentle-looking, shy maiden who sits apart, and is not clad in stately robes. Will you take her out?'

'Most certainly, if it is fitting.' He went to the master of the revels, and asked the name of the fair girl, whose dress, though suitable, was plain indeed when compared with other ladies. 'Was she of birth sufficient to allow him to ask her to join in the dance?'

'Certainly.' The official could see no objection, and he was of course versed in all matters of etiquette. 'She is the Lady Edgitha, daughter of Sir Bertram of Exmoor.'

John's heart warmed at once to a maiden from the West-country, Saxon though she might be. She was fair and graceful, and though her only ornaments were natural flowers, they were tastefully arranged. Though startled and surprised at being

singled out by the Sieur de Courcy, her shyness did not make her awkward; and after the dance was over he introduced her to Elfrica as a country-woman of his own from Somerset.

Elfrica soon placed the country-bred maiden at her ease, and before long she was talking happily of Exmoor and its pixies; of the red deer in the forest-land of Dunster and its lordly Castle; of Taunton Deane and King Ina's Castle; of the rich landscapes of Somerset, with their purple distance; of Glastonbury and its memories. But there the Lady Elfrica was as well instructed as Edgitha herself, for had not Sir John de Courcy told her, again and again, every legend and tale of the glassy isle? Then, too, she spoke of her voyage from Bristol, and how lonely she felt amongst the great Norman ladies.

'But, madame, I crave your pardon for talking so much.'

Elfrica encouraged her, and told her how dear it was to her to hear of her Lord's

native land; and then she asked her how it was that she had left it.

Edgitha answered that her father was but a poor knight, though derived from an ancient and honourable family; he had taken service with Sir Hugh de Lacy, with whom he had fought in the Holy Land; her mother had died in her husband's absence. She was their only child, and having no vocation for the cloister, her father had consented, at her own earnest request, to take her with him; but she was too poor to appear in any great lady's train.

'And so I fear I am a great charge to my dear father.'

'Well, dear Lady Edgitha,' said the Lady de Courcy, 'I am a stranger, too, amongst these ladies, so we can feel for one another. Would——? Do you think——?'

Edgitha turned eagerly towards her, but Elfrica blushed, paused, and said: 'I forgot; I must ask my Lord.'

But when she found herself again alone with her husband, she began eagerly:

'Dear my Lord, I have a boon to ask.'

'It is granted before asked, Elfrica, if it be possible.'

'Ah, my dear Lord, I am not sure! because I do not yet quite understand the position of the different races in England, who appear to bring their prejudices and rivalries here.'

'I fear it is too true, Elfrica; but what can you have to do with these vexed questions of right, precedence and etiquette? As Princess of Man and my wife,' he said, 'your position is assured.'

'Oh yes,' she said, smiling; 'it is not my own position of which I am speaking; but you wished that I should have a lady of English birth as attendant and companion, as Gytha and Norna are scarcely more than handmaidens, and I do so wish, if it might me, that Edgitha, Sir Bertram of Exmoor's daughter, would take this post.' And as her husband appeared to

hesitate: 'You see, my Lord, I feel strange and out of place here; and though they are courteous and kind, the Irish ladies frighten me, and the Norman ladies are so grand and stately, that I feel such a little nobody, as if I wanted to shrink away and hide myself in your arms' (they were around her). 'But with this sweet, modest, shy Edgitha,' she laughed, 'I feel myself some one; I can protect her, and I am quite a lady of importance. And then, John'—the name came out with a pause and an effort—'it would be such a kindness to them, they are so poor, and yet she is really a lady.'

'Ah, you little witch! you know that if you conjure me with my own name, I must needs do your bidding.'

'Nay,' she said, 'when I told you that they were poor, and that it would be doing them a kindness, I knew that I had prevailed. May I ask her?'

'Yes,' he said; 'John de Courcy need ask no one's permission as to whom he

should take into his household, and it will come with better grace from you.'

The next day, when De Courcy was busy in consultation with nobles, warriors and chiefs, before the party broke up, the Lady Elfrica managed to secure the company of the fair Saxon.

'Edgitha,' she said, 'if I may call you so,' laying her own hand gently on hers, 'I have a favour to ask of you.'

'Of me, lady?'

'Yes, dear Edgitha; tell me, will your father spare you, and will you come and live with me, and be my friend? My Lord has often to be away, and then I feel sad and lonely; and I think, I am sure, I could make a friend of you.'

'Oh, madame, that would be happiness indeed! If I could believe that I should be a comfort to you, I cannot tell you how thankful I should be; and my father—my dear father—he will be so grateful to think that I should be so cared for; and he never has dared to hope that I could be

received into such a household as yours. Dear lady, only tell me how to thank you!'

'By being my friend, Edgitha; and will your father be willing to part with you?'

'Madame! but has not the Sieur de Courcy told you?'

'Told me what, child?'

'Oh, madame! did you not know that he, your noble husband, made offer to my father, with the permission of the Baron de Lacy, to receive him into his own band of knights, not only because they were fellow-countrymen, but he told my father that he must be often away, and that he wished for an older knight than either of those that had joined his standard; "a knight," he kindly said, "of honourable fame and assured character, who would guard his Castle of Doune in his absence, and shield you, lady, from aught that is painful and unpleasing."'

Tears started to Elfrica's eyes at this fresh instance of her husband's loving care and thought for her.

'Now, we shall indeed be friends, Edgitha. Sir John would not tell me, that I might have the pleasure of asking you myself; but how good of him, and you see it was his thought first!'

When De Courcy had transacted what public business there was, he sought his wife, and said:

'Will the Lady Elfrica pardon her Lord the deceit he has practised upon her? for I can scarcely hope,' he added, 'that Edgitha has kept my secret.'

'Ah, my Lord! how shall I trust you another time?'

'Not if I promise never to offend again —unless,' he added, laughing, 'for a like excellent reason.'

'Then I will be appeased; but, John,' and she looked up to him as she clung to his arm, 'promise to let me share not only your joys but your sorrows, your anxieties, your hopes and fears; do not let me be a mere toy.'

She looked at him so earnestly, that he

could but bend down and kiss her fondly, and say:

'Yes, my darling, I must have perfect trust where I love; and I would not have cheated you in this, but that I thought your offer would come with so much better grace if you did not know of my intention.'

'And it makes the whole plan so perfect, John, that we should separately have thought of this, and that our plans should fit in so well together.'

So back they went to their own Castle of Doune—'Home,' as Elfrica loved to call the grim fortress—and settled down to their ordinary life.

It was with a fatherly care that Sir Bertram undertook his charge; indeed, the Lady Elfrica soon scarcely ranked even second to his own daughter in his heart—they were his two girls; yet he always paid her the most chivalrous respect and devotion, though he mingled with it a certain bluntness that he cherished as part of his Saxon character.

When they were gathered together in the long winter evenings, it became the custom to demand a song or tale from each in turn, and gradually by one or the other every legend of Somerset had been said or sung. The oldest of all, that of Bath and the scientific Prince Bladud and his swine; or Cymbeline and Arviragus; or Joseph of Arimathy and Glastonbury; or Arthur and Camelot; Alfred and the Isle of Atheleny; Guthrum the fierce Dane's baptism at Aller, and his chrism loosing at Wedmore;* of Dunstan and King Edward's hunt at Cheddar; of Montacute and the Holy Cross at Waltham; of St. Decuman, and St. David, and St. Patrick—but when St. Patrick's name was mentioned it was the signal for a fierce controversy between the men of Somerset and those of Doune, each stoutly maintaining that the saint's body was laid at Glastonbury, or at Downpatrick, respectively, and the contention ran so high at times that the name

* *See* Freeman's 'Old English History of Children.'

of St. Patrick had well-nigh to be prohibited.

But when the Lord de Courcy was at home, and could join the circle, he would sit in the high-backed chair made of Irish bog-oak, and ever beside him, on a low-cushioned seat with her hand in his, sat the Lady Elfrica. And then the Knight would make her take her turn in tale or legend or song, for no voice was as sweet to his ear as hers; and the tales of Somerset he knew every one, and well pleased as he was that she should learn them, yet he loved best to hear her tell a tale of Mona's isle. And so, at her Lord's desire, she would begin some ancient legend of her own native isle. Only altered into modern English, this is how she phrased the legend of—

'The Finding of Mona and the Discomfiture of the Fairies.'

'It was long years ago, dear friends, that Mona was first discovered by human

beings. The greater island of Britain, and this our beautiful green isle of Erin,' she said, with a smile that glinted like a sunbeam on the Irish who were present, 'were peopled by tribes who came, and saw, and dwelt in those fair lands; but Mona was yet an undiscovered country. No human foot had ever trodden its shore, no human eye had ever rested upon it; and though vessels passed on every side, yet they carefully avoided the spot over which, for some unknown cause, a thick veil of mist ever hung.

'But Mona was not therefore desolate; for it was the chosen resort of those beautiful, supernatural and capricious beings—the fairies. The island was guarded from all profane intrusion by the thick mist which hid it from human eyes, but within the circle of enchantment the sun ever shone brilliantly by day, whilst the pale white beams of the moon silvered the landscape at night. The isle literally swarmed with fairy bands: every grotto was filled with them, every

mountain-top teemed with them, every valley witnessed the mazes of their graceful dances; they dived in the sea which surrounded their shores; they glided in their tiny boats on the streams; while through their incessant cares the island flowers were painted of the loveliest hues, the glowing skies were tinted with the most exquisite dyes; and their occupations and their amusements were so blended together, that their business was in truth their pleasure. Only one care they had, and that was the preservation of the sacred fire upon which, by some strange anomaly, depended the continuance of the blue mist which ever hid them from the outer world.

'Chosen from among the fairies were a band of vestal virgins, whose duty it was to tend the fire; any thought of love was denied them, nor could they, save at rare intervals, mingle in the gay sports of their companions. This band was watched over by an ancient fairy of grim aspect, who, for

some indiscretion committed in her youth, long ages past, had been placed amongst them, and had gradually risen to be their chief. Strict indeed was her rule, and sore were her punishments for breaking it. Long had the vestal fairies determined to rebel against the one-eyed gorgon Lucasta, but none had as yet dared to initiate the revolt, when, one day, appeared in the band a beautiful young fairy, whose pouting lips and swollen eyes, as well as her dishevelled tresses and the little round shoulder displayed to view whilst she endeavoured to hide her face, showed how highly she resented being included in the guardian-band.

'At first she refused to speak to anyone, and sullenly performed her duties; but gradually she made friends with the least grim of the sisterhood, and confided to her her sorrows. She had been sought in marriage by a young fairy of her own age; but a daughter of the Fairy Queen had set her affections upon her beloved

Syan, and for some perfectly imaginary offence she was condemned to the care of the celestial fire, in order that she might be removed from her rival's path. "But," said she passionately, "I would rather be condemned to the flames and perish in them, than live this dreary life." And so, by degrees, a settled purpose was formed by the two friends, and they determined to put an end to their dreary slavery, by letting the cause of it—the sacred fire—die of exhaustion.

'It was the custom that each of the band, in her turn, should keep guard over the fire, and supply it with fresh fuel, and woe betide the one who was not at her duty! The lynx-eyed Lucasta suddenly appeared, and the defaulter was nipped and pinched; she was ordered to keep a double watch; she was made to tend the fire till her wings were singed, and then sent to rest in the dampest cell, where the cold chill mist and the wet moss were sure to cause aching limbs and husky throat. The con-

spirators therefore had to set wilily to work.

'Now Lucasta had a grotto of her own, with comforts specially adapted to a fairy of uncertain age. It was warm and light; the moss was of the softest, and the rays of the sun entered sufficiently to drink up the morning dews. She was accustomed on each day about noontide to retire to her grotto and take a nap. It was Ridente's watch; they had laid their plans well, and when they had audible evidence that Lucasta's slumber was deep, Ridente with her friend Agila closed up the entrance with a shell which they had already brought in readiness from the shore. They bound it tightly with hanging creepers, so that no creature, however tiny, could find a crevice to get in or out. Then they deliberately took away the guard which shielded the fire from the rays of the burning sun, and, omitting to supply the fuel, their double watch was not over before, whilst peeping, half in merriment and half in fear, from behind

two harebells, they beheld the last faint spark die out. At this moment the sad-eyed Vigilante appeared to take her watch. With a piercing shriek she flew to the spot—not a trace of fire was to be seen!

'Then from grotto and cave, from beneath the shady mushroom, from the empty snail-shell, came fairy after fairy of the vestal band; not a spark was to be seen, not the faintest trace of smoke that could be coaxed by fairy breath, or the gentle waving of their wings, into a flame. There were the embers, black and cold. Where were Ridente and Agila, whose duty it had been to keep the last two watches? And where, above all, was the ever-watchful Lucasta? Never had she been known to suffer two such young, careless, wilful fairies to keep guard successively without once making her appearance.

'Just then the anxious group were conscious of hollow sounds—drumming, interspersed with smothered shrieks! They

looked around, they listened—surely the sounds came from Lucasta's grotto. Thither they all trooped. Impotent shrieks, alternating with entreaties for freedom, were heard; the wreaths of creepers were soon unloosed, but they had to proceed with caution lest the shell which closed the entrance should fall upon and crush one of these tiny beings. At last the work was done, and Lucasta was at liberty.

'To say that her eyes sparkled, that her wings were ruffled, that her voice was convulsed, is to say little. Sure never was such fury exhibited before by one of these tiny creatures. Of course, after the manner of human beings, she first fell upon those who had delivered her, and it was long before she would listen to their protestations of innocence, or before they could manage to tell her of the dire misfortune that had taken place. Now her fury was changed to blank despair—pale, affrighted, she was rooted to the spot. At last she spoke:

'"Alas! alas! our empire is gone, our

kingdom has departed from us; Mona is no longer ours."

'She tore her hair, she beat her wings, she shed torrents of tears. The guilty authors of the mischief, even, were moved at her distress; yet the more grief and horror that was shown, the less dared they discover themselves. The news spread, as ill news is sure to do, and Mab the Queen came herself to know what really had taken place. Meanwhile Ridente and Agila, hiding themselves behind the fern and the harebells, creeping from stalk to stalk, escaped to the other side of the hill, and, tripping up the steep ascent, with a delight born of recovered freedom, reached the top, and cast their eyes on the vision that presented itself. But what was their astonishment to see that the bank of blue vapour had disappeared, which hitherto had veiled the outside world from their eyes! Their horizon was enlarged to an incalculable extent; clear and brilliant shone the blue sky above; the waves danced

around on every side, catching, on the edge of the foam, the sheen of the sun's rays, and as they broke on the shore, shivering the landscape mirrored on their surface into a thousand glittering fragments. Around them was the sparkling expanse of water, with its ever-shifting phases of colour, and the fascinating undulations of its motion. Beyond loomed, in a brilliant haze, the mountains of this our land. Boats with sails of many colours rose and sank upon the waves; birds flew over the wide sea, catching the glorious light upon their white wings, as they rose high in the air, or dipped their pinions in the sea, or skimmed the surface of the water.

'Ridente and Agila stood spell-bound at the glorious sight.

'"Ah!" said the latter, clasping her tiny hands, "is this of what Lucasta has so often warned us? Did she grudge us the sight of all this beauty? And if this island is no longer our fortress and our

prison, surely we gain a wider experience, a larger wisdom, a more extended knowledge." And the two giddy young fairies executed one of their most graceful dances on the very verge of the hill. "No sense had they of ills to come, no care beyond to-day."

'But hark! a wail of sadness reaches their ears, and a buzzing as of fairy wings. Bands were trooping in every direction; sentinels were placed at every turn; they had been missed, and can no longer hope to escape detection. They are seized by a band of skirmishers, and carried trembling captives before the Queen. They are questioned, and with tears and sobs confess their fault, but endeavour to exculpate themselves by laying the blame upon the severity of the Lady Lucasta's rule.

'"Ye are like to suffer dearly for your frolic," said the Queen sternly and sadly. "I and my household fairies and body-guard can troop whither we will, and floating on the moonbeams, can seek for fresh

homes, where we can sport as yet undisturbed. But you, ye who belong to this island and may not leave it, mankind will soon discover this fair spot; they will establish themselves here; your sporting-grounds will be circumscribed; your most cherished groves will be invaded, and you will be compelled to hide yourselves in the tangled forests from the eyes of the intruders."

'"For ourselves, madam," said Ridente, "we cannot be more miserable than we were. We grieve that we shall lose your Highness's society, but we cannot regret that our terrible bondage is at an end."

'The Queen glanced wrathfully at the daring speaker; but at that moment a sight so strange appalled them that the dispute was hushed at once.

'They were gathered in a glen which led straight down to the sea, and there, to the curiosity of some, to the horror of others, to the surprise of all, they saw a boat with white sails making its way

towards the shore. The sails were taken down, and the sailors ran the boat up on the beach. The Queen rose in fierce anger.

"Place these betrayers of their race in strict ward," she said to her guards; "and you," turning to a band of skirmishers, "do all ye can to stay the landing of these strangers. And now, don your invisible coats."

'Alas! they had never needed them before, and scarce knew that they possessed them; but they made their preparations at once, and as the men leaped on shore, they fell over invisible ropes; they were pinched; they stumbled and cut their faces and hands, and if they used bad language great was the wrath of the fairies. They appeared to have dust cast in their eyes, though it was indeed but the beating of fairy wings. Blinded and dizzy they cut their feet with the sharp stones, and as they endeavoured to escape from the beach, they were led by fairy devices into

tangled forests, were torn by thorns, and bewildered by groans and sighs alternating with shrill screams and laughter. Wildly at last, the rash mortals fled back to their boat, pursued by their fairy tormentors, who pinched them black and blue ere they reached their vessel.

'Great was the rejoicing, and high were the revels held in fairyland that night at the discomfiture of the human beings; and in the general joy Ridente and Agila were set at liberty. The sacred fire was again lighted, and careful watch was kept to see the effect; but though the fire burned brightly, the blue mist never rose again, and the island remained visible to all who might pass that way. Lucasta was warned to be less severe, and a stated period was fixed for the time when the fairies had to remain as vestals. In the meantime, Syan, Ridente's lover, was offered a post in the Queen's bodyguard, and he, hearing of the misfortunes that were to come upon the island, and allured by the temptation

of an alliance with royalty, deserted the charming Ridente, and attached himself to Mora, the daughter of the Fairy Queen.

'Evening came; the moon was at the full. Ridente was weeping the loss of her beloved Syan in a grotto that looked out upon the sea, when she heard a whispering and a gathering, a muttering and a fluttering of wings; and as she peeped out, she saw the Queen of the fairies, attended by all her guards, with Mora and Syan by her side.

'Away they swept, across the broad disc of the moon, singing in the moonbeams as they floated out to sea:

> '"Farewell, farewell! far hence we roam,
> From mortal gaze and our island home."

Then she threw herself on the floor of the grotto, for she knew that it was her own act and deed that had separated her for ever from him she loved. And so it happened in fairyland as amongst us

mortals; reforms, the effect of agitation, are introduced when too late, while the treason of the traitors reacts upon themselves.

'But I weary you, gentles,' said the Lady de Courcy, 'and——Ah! I have talked my Lord to sleep!'

The rest of the circle assured her that they were not weary, but would fain hear more of the fortunes of the fairies of Mona; and so with an amused smile, but a faint blush as she felt that even in his sleep her hand was fondly clasped by her husband, she continued, but somewhat shortened the conclusion of her tale.

'From that day men landed again and again, to see this strange island whose existence even had hitherto been unknown; and it came to pass, that though attacked by bands of fairies, invisible to their gross sight, yet at each invasion they gained some fresh ground, till at last the fairies had to confine their haunts to the inmost recesses of the isle.

'After some time, a sort of truce was made between the fairies and the human creatures, and they began to agree well together—the fairies giving their favours and their gifts to those whom they saw industrious, pious, and well-disposed; and men on their part taking care not to offend the little people, their whims, and their caprices, neither to invade their haunts nor break their laws. The island then was prosperous, and the two races dwelt side by side in harmony.

'But alas! a new trouble came upon Mona — it was so long ago that I cannot tell you whether the invasion of giants, which disturbed the peace of the island, was caused by some of those who, banished by the Trojan Brute, sought refuge in Mona, or whether it was at a later period when the Romans left Britain, and giants and salvage-men, who had increased in the land, and were driven out by the Britons, brought horror and confusion into that once favoured isle. How

this was I do not know; time long ago seems to gather into a small space in our mind's eye, and the years, like the trees in a long avenue, seem to press closer together the further they are in distance from us. In the contest that arose between the men and the giants, the fairies who had grown accustomed to the human beings fought on their side; but it was little indeed that they could do. These huge and savage beings flung mountains upon the men, and annihilated whole armies of them at once; if they met them singly they caught them in their arms and flung them headlong into the sea; they minded their fairy tormentors no more than they would a swarm of gnats, and the whole race of men on the island were swept away or escaped.

'Sadly the fairies drooped in their hiding-places, and scarce wept when the period of their departure from the earth came to each. But it happened one day, coming from the funeral of Lucasta, whose departure was mourned by Ridente

and Agila, so much had age and misfortune softened her harshness, lo! as they passed in solemn silence what they still called the sacred fire, though its charm was gone, they saw crowding into the harbour a fleet of ships; and as the first vessel touched the strand, forth from its deck sprang a warrior, noble and splendid in his appearance. He was clad in steel armour, and in his hand he held a sword of rare beauty, whose hilt glittered with gems, and whose blade flashed in the sunlight.

'Vigilante was now the chief of the fairies, and she desired a band of them to hover unseen about these new arrivals, and discover who they were. Agila, passing from one to the other of the mortals, soon discovered that the new-comers were the glorious King Arthur, with Merlin the great Enchanter, and the men of Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset.'

'Somerset!' said Sir John de Courcy; 'what of Somerset?'

'Ah, my Lord! I have found the charm to rouse you from your slumbers.'

'It shames me, Elfrica, to think that I have slept through your minstrel story, but your voice soothed me like sweet music. But what of Somerset?'

'I had just come, my Lord, to where King Arthur, with the men of Somerset and the West-country, attacked the giants who had taken possession of Mona, and overcoming them, drove them into the sea.'

'And then, what happened next?'

'The fairies regained their favourite haunts, and henceforth, for many years, the island remained a refuge and asylum for all oppressed and betrayed princes; for Arthur did not leave till the fortifications were restored, and Peel Castle built by Merlin's magic power.'

'Ah, Bertram! is not this wife of mine a little witch to weave into her legend a tale concerning Arthur and his knights, Somerset and Merlin?'

'But,' said Elfrica eagerly, 'indeed, my Lord, I did not put it in; it is quite true.' Then seeing a smile upon her husband's face: 'I mean,' she said, 'that it is really part of the Manx legend, and not my invention.' She laughed, and added, 'For I do not believe I am clever enough to do it.'

'Well,' said De Courcy, 'speaking of Somerset, I had thought, ere this, to have had a messenger from thence. I have been expecting news of Almeric and Mabel. But now, Father Geoffrey, surely it is time for Compline.'

And so they passed to the evening service in the chapel. 'Vigilante' was given as the watchword, and quiet and peace reigned in the Castle.

END OF VOL. I.

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